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THE LIFE AND WORKS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER,

BY

ROBERT SOUTHEY, ESQ., L.L.D.

VOL. I.

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THE

WORKS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER, Esq.

COMPRISING

HIS POEMS,

CORRESPONDENCE, AND TRANSLATIONS.

WITH

A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY THE EDITOR,

ROBERT SOUTHEY, Esq. LL. D.

POET LAUREATE, ETC.

LONDON:

BALDWIN AND CRADOCK,

PATERNOSTER ROW.

1835.

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C. WHITTINGHAM, COLLEGE HOUSE.

PREFACE.

WHEREFORE the present edition of Cowper's Works is not announced as being complete, and wherefore there can be no complete edition of them at this time, are questions which that part of the public who take an interest in such things may be expected to ask, and which the Editor can satisfactorily answer, as far as relates to the Publishers and to himself.

In the autumn of 1833 he was requested by those Publishers to undertake such an edition; they gave him credit for that knowledge of general literature, and more especially of English literature, without which no one who regarded his own reputation would take upon himself an office of this kind; and there was another motive which led them to make the application, and which induced him to accede to it: he entertained a sense of gratitude towards a poet whose writings had so often, and, in earlier years, so profitably delighted him; Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock, therefore, supposing him competent to the task, rightly inferred from his known sentiments, that he would not be disinclined to undertake it. Shortly afterwards

another firm made a like application to him: the intention in that quarter was abandoned when it was made known in reply, that an arrangement had already been concluded; and a third publisher, who had previously formed the same design, and was about to have proposed it to the same person, gave up his intention also when he knew that the ground was taken.

Two volumes of Cowper's letters had been edited, under the title of Private Correspondence, in 1824, by his friend and kinsman, the late Dr. J. Johnson. They had obtained so poor a sale, that upwards of one thousand copies were remaining in the publisher's warehouse. Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock proposed to purchase whatever copyright there might be in these volumes, with the remaining stock; the publishers held them in treaty for several months, and in the mean while began secretly to print an edition of Cowper's works in the same form as this, which had been previously announced, and for which preparations had been made, wherein neither care nor expense had been spared. An editor was found, whom the Evangelical Magazine pronounced "from personal knowledge" to be "the only living man who could do justice to the life of Cowper." Their eagerness to get into the field was such, that the first volume was published before the engravings for it could be made ready; and the work, thus surreptitiously prepared and hurried

into the world, was announced as the only complete edition of Cowper.

Meantime, the present Editor was receiving assistance, to an extent beyond his expectations, from the surviving friends of Cowper, and the representatives of those who were departed. Collections of letters were entrusted to him, and portraits lent for the engraver's use. His progress had been arrested by domestic circumstances; but if this had not been the case, a sense of what was due to the author, and to the public, would have withheld him from hastily performing the work in which he had engaged.

Had Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock completed the purchase upon which they were so long held in treaty, his intention was to have inserted, in the Life of Cowper, only such extracts from his letters as might be spun into the thread of the narration; and after the biography, to have arranged the whole correspondence; which, with the large additions that he was enabled to make, might then indeed have been called complete. Finding it not in his power to proceed upon this plan, it became necessary for him to extend the biographical part of his design, and to work more in mosaic: he has made such use of the letters in Dr. J. Johnson's collection as he had an unquestionable right to do; he has extracted from them as largely as suited his purpose, and has brought

into his narrative the whole of the information contained in them. The purchasers of the present Edition will in this respect lose nothing.

It would be unbecoming in him to offer any remarks upon the manner in which Mr. Grimshawe has performed an undertaking which he says, he was "called upon to engage in both on public and private grounds." But there is a passage in that gentleman's preface which must not be left unnoticed. After declaring his purpose of "revising Hayley's Life of the Poet, purifying it from the errors that detract from its acknowledged value, and adapting it to the demands and expectations of the religious public," Mr. Grimshawe says he is enabled to effect this object, "and to present for the first time a *Complete Edition of the Works of Cowper*, which it is not in the power of any individual besides himself to accomplish, because *all others are debarred access to the Private Correspondence.*" Mr. Grimshawe (it is presumed,) is a member of the Eclectic Society[1], founded by Mr. Newton, and not of the Society founded by St. Ignatius Loyola: he cannot therefore be supposed to use words with a mental reservation. But in what sense can it be said, that any person is *debarred access* to a book which has been upon sale ever since it was published, twelve years ago?

[1] "Consisting of several pious ministers, who statedly met for the purpose of mutual edification. It is still in existence." *Note to Mr. Grimshawe's Cowper*, vol. ii. 107.

The more grateful task must now be performed of acknowledging the assistance with which the Editor has been favoured. He is obliged to the widow of Dr. J. Johnson for the interest she has taken in an Edition which it was hoped would in no respect be unworthy of Cowper's name; to Mr. Bodham Donne, of Mattishall (Cowper's kinsman), for the use of his family pictures, and other favours, which will be specified in the proper place; to Mr. Stephen, of the Colonial Office, for Mr. Newton's letters to Mr. Thornton, written during his residence at Olney; to Mr. Bull, for the unpublished letters to his father, and for the passages heretofore omitted in those which were published; to Mr. Unwin, for entrusting him with the letters which he had in like manner inherited,—a large and most valuable collection, comprising many which have not been printed, and more which were mutilated, for reasons that no longer exist; to Mr. Rowley, for the letters to Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, which throw new light upon Cowper's history, both personal and literary; and to Mrs. Micklem, (through the kind offices of Mr. Gutch,) for Lady Hesketh's collection,—a most important series, the greater part of which will be new to the public; and also for Hayley's letters to that lady, after Cowper's decease. Other obligations will be duly and thankfully acknowledged as they are made use of.

It remains for him to notice here one communication, which he has no other means of replying to. An admirer of Cowper, and a most attentive reader of his works, has sent him a copy of the Task, in the margin of which he has inserted such parallel passages as he supposed Cowper, while composing the text, might have had, wittingly or unwittingly, in mind. He accompanied it with a very useful index to that poem, thinking that, "although the Task is one of the most popular long poems in our language, it is probably the one in which, from its discursive character, we find with most difficulty a half-remembered passage." The Editor takes this opportunity of informing his unknown friend, that he means to avail himself both of the notes and index; and of requesting that, if he will not favour him with his name (with which, however, it would gratify the Editor to be made acquainted), he will at least let him know where the volumes of the present Work may be sent him, as they are published, in acknowledgement of obligation and respect.

KESWICK, *Oct.* 6, 1835.

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LIFE OF COWPER.

CHAPTER I.

COWPER'S BIRTH, FAMILY, AND EDUCATION.

WILLIAM COWPER, the most popular poet of his generation, and the best of English letter-writers, was born on the 15th of November (old style), 1731, in the Rectory, at Great Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire.

The place of his birth is remarkable in English history. The Mercian kings had a palace there; and it again became a royal residence under the first of the Plantagenets, who granted to the men and merchants thereof liberty to trade through all his lands of England and Normandy and Aquitain and Anjou, without paying either custom or exaction; and that they should be quit of all servile works, and be exempt from all tolls, and enjoy the same liberties, laws, and customs as in the times of Edward the Confessor; and that no market should be held within seven miles of the town. From Henry I.'s time, the honour and castle of Berkhamstead went with the earldom of Cornwall. Twice they were granted to unfortunate favourites; by

Edward II. to Piers Gaveston, and by Richard II. to Robert de Vere. Cicely, Duchess of York and mother of the last of the Plantagenets, resided here during the latter years of her unhappy life; and from the time of her death, the honour of Berkhamstead has descended to the successive princes of Wales with the dukedom of Cornwall. Notable as these circumstances are, this little town will be more known in after ages as the birth-place of Cowper than for its connexion with so many historical personages who figured in the tragedies of old.

We are told that the poet used playfully to moralize upon the pride of pedigree, and to say he believed one of his ancestors had migrated from Scotland in a very humble condition. It is not unlikely that he might have been willing to fancy himself related to a good old Scotch bishop of James the First's time, who was his namesake; but more than this, knowing the history of his own family, he could not[1] have intended; and free as he was, and as every Christian ought to be, from the leaven of ancestral pride, it cannot be supposed that he was insensible to the value of a good name, in the hereditary sense of that word. There is a pleasure in tracing the parentage of an illustrious man as far as records and tradition afford any light, as there is in exploring the sources of a famous river;

[1] In one of his letters he says that he was originally of Fifeshire, and that a family of his name still existed there. But Bishop Cooper was a native of Edinburgh; and families of that name are to be found wherever a Cooper, or Cow-keeper, or a general dealer (*Kooper*, Dutch) took the name of his occupation and transmitted it to his posterity.

and no one will depreciate the humble labours of the genealogist, who knows how many useful pursuits are incidentally subserved by such researches.

John Cowper of Strode, in the parish of Slingfield, Sussex, married Joan, the daughter and heiress[2] of John Stanbridge, of the same parish, in the sixth year of Edward IV. 1465. This appears to be the first mention of a name which afterwards is found repeatedly among the sheriffs of London. Their descendant, Sir William Cowper, was created a baronet of Nova Scotia, and afterwards (in 1631-2) of England, and knighted at Theobald's in the following year. Ratling Court, in Nonington, Kent, was his seat at that time; and he is memorable for having erected a monument to Hooker in the neighbouring church of Bishopsbourne, more than thirty years after his death, with an epitaph of his own composed in verse. The principles which Sir William declared in that epitaph, he maintained in evil days; during those days, he was imprisoned for his loyalty, in Ely House, with his eldest son: the son died under his confinement; the father outlived his troubles, and "residing at his castle of Hertford, was famed for hospitality, charity, and other Christian virtues; often visiting his poor neighbours, and relieving them in private, according to their necessities." He died in 1664, at the great age of eighty-two. His grandson and successor, Sir William,

[2] She must have been a person of some consideration, for in a deed preparatory to this marriage, her estates were conveyed in trust to the Lord Maltravers; John Bourchier, Lord Berners (the translator of Froissart); Sir John Audley, Lord Audley, and Thomas St. Leger, esquire of the king's body.

was father of the first Earl Cowper, lord chancellor, and of Spencer[3] Cowper, one of the judges of the court of Common Pleas. John Cowper, D.D. chaplain to George II., rector of Great Berkhamstead, and father of the poet, was the judge's second son, by his first wife, Judith Pennington.

Dr. Cowper married Anne, daughter of Roger Donne, Esq. of Ludham Hall, in Norfolk; Donne, whose name and deserts, if his own works were forgotten, would be preserved by Izaak Walton, was of the same family. Through the Hippesleys of Throughley in Sussex, and the Pellats of Bolney in the same county, this lady was "descended from the several noble houses of West, Knollys, Carey, Bullen, Howard, and Mowbray; and so by four different lines from Henry III. King of England." "Distinctions of this nature," says the poet's friend and kinsman, Dr. Johnson, "can shed no additional lustre on the memory of Cowper: yet genius, however exalted, disdains not, while it boasts not, the splendour of ancestry; and royalty itself may be pleased, and perhaps benefited, by discovering its kindred to such piety, such purity, and such talents as his."

It is not, however, for her genealogy, however illustrious, that this lady is and will ever be remembered, but for being the mother of a poet who has embalmed her memory in everlasting verse. She died in 1737, at the age of thirty-four, in child-bed, leaving, of several children, only two sons. "I can truly say,"

[3] This is a family name, derived from the marriage of William Cowper with the daughter of Thomas Spencer, of St Peter's Cornhill, London, in the thirty-fourth of Henry VIII.

said Cowper, nearly fifty years after her death, "that not a week passes (perhaps I might with equal veracity say a day) in which I do not think of her: such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for showing it was so short."

Mrs. Cowper was buried in the chancel of her husband's church, where a monument was erected to her, bearing this epitaph, which was composed by her niece, afterwards Lady Walsingham.

Here lies, in early years bereft of life,
The best of mothers and the kindest wife;
Who neither knew nor practised any art,
Secure in all she wish'd, her husband's heart.
Her love to him, still prevalent in death,
Pray'd Heaven to bless him with her latest breath.

Still was she studious never to offend;
And glad of an occasion to commend,
With ease would pardon injuries received,
Nor e'er was cheerful when another grieved:
Despising state, with her own lot content,
Enjoyed the comforts of a life well-spent;
Resign'd, when Heaven demanded back, her breath,
Her mind heroic 'midst the pangs of death.

Whoe'er thou art that dost this tomb draw near,
O stay awhile, and shed a friendly tear!
These lines, though weak, are as herself, sincere.

Cowper was old enough to feel his loss poignantly, and he has recorded his feelings on this occasion in the most beautiful of his minor poems.

My mother! when I learn'd that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,—
Wretch even then, life's journey just begun?

Perhaps thou gavest me, though unseen, a kiss,
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss.
I heard the bell toll'd on thy burial day,
I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away;
And turning from my nursery window, drew
A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu.

He was old enough, too, if not to understand the greatness of his loss, to be made sensible of its immediate consequences, by being sent at six years of age from home to a boarding-school, the first of those sad changes through which a gentle spirit has to pass in this uneasy and disordered world. His infancy is said to have been "delicate in no common degree," and his constitution to have discovered at a very early season its morbid tendency to diffidence, melancholy, and despair. Whatever may be the advantages of a school education for ordinary subjects, his was a case both of body and mind, for which the peacefulness and security of home, and the constant tenderness of a wise and watchful mother, were peculiarly required. The school at which he was placed was at Market Street in Hertfordshire, kept by a Dr. Pitman. The number of boys was considerable; and as in most institutions of this kind then, and in too many of them still, the most momentous part of education,..that of moral discipline,..seems to have been totally disregarded there.

"Here," says Cowper, "I had hardships of various kinds to conflict with, which I felt more sensibly in proportion to the tenderness with which I had been treated at home. But my chief affliction consisted in being singled out from all the other boys, by a lad of

about fifteen years of age, as a proper object upon whom he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to conceal a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me. It will be sufficient to say, that his savage treatment of me impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than his knees; and that I knew him better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress. May the Lord pardon him, and may we meet in glory!

"One day as I was sitting alone upon a bench in the school-room, melancholy, and almost ready to weep at the recollection of what I had already suffered, and expecting at the same time my tormentor every moment, the words of the Psalmist came into my mind, 'I will not fear what flesh can do unto me!' I applied them to my own case, with a degree of trust and confidence in God that would have been no disgrace to a much more experienced Christian. I instantly perceived in myself a briskness of spirits and a cheerfulness I had never before experienced, and took several paces up and down the room with joyful alacrity,.. His gift in whom I trusted. But alas! it was the first and last instance of this kind between infancy and manhood. The cruelty of this boy, which he had long practised in so secret a manner that no creature suspected it, was at length discovered; he was expelled the school[4], and I was taken from it."

[4] In Cowper's account of his own early life, this school is said to have been in Bedfordshire; but Hayley says Hertford-

The tyranny under which Cowper, for two years, suffered there, made, as it well might, a deep and lasting impression upon him; and to this it is that the strong dislike with which, in the latter part of his life, he regarded all schools, must be ascribed. I know not whether wicked propensities are ever cured at school; but this I know, that they generally find full play there; and that a system of preventive discipline which should impose some effectual restraint upon brutal dispositions, at that age when they are subject to control, would be one of the surest means of national reformation. It is needed alike for those who are being trained in our seminaries of sound and orthodox learning for the higher walks of life and the more important stations of society, and for those who are training themselves in the streets and purlieus of every populous place for transportation or the gallows.

shire, mentioning also the place and the name of the master; and as Cowper was only at one private school, subsequent biographers have properly followed Hayley. The mistake probably originated in the press, Cowper's own Memoirs having apparently been printed from an ill written manuscript. Of this there is a whimsical proof (p. 35), where the Persian Letters of Montesquieu are spoken of, and the compositor, unable to decipher that author's name, has converted it into *Mules Quince*.

There are, however, two errors in this part of Hayley's account; he supposes that Cowper was probably removed from this school because of a complaint in his eyes, and he transfers the scene of his sufferings under a cruel boy to Westminster. I should not notice these, or any such mistakes, were it not to justify the difference in my own statement, which on both these points is drawn from Cowper's own memoir.

When Cowper was removed from Dr. Pitman's, he was in some danger of losing his sight, specks having appeared on both eyes, which it was feared might cover them. He was therefore placed in the house of an eminent oculist, whose wife also had obtained great celebrity in the same branch of medical science. With them he remained two years, according to his own account, "to no good purpose;" yet it appears that the progress of the disease was stopped there, and that the great weakness of his eyes, with which he had previously been afflicted, must have been much relieved, for when he left their house he was placed at Westminster school. He was then ten years old; at fourteen he was seized with the small-pox; he was severely handled by it, and in imminent danger, but this disease, he says, proved the best oculist, it removed the specks entirely. The eyes however still remained very liable to inflammation, and though this liability was afterwards much diminished, it continued in some degree as long as he lived. He was of opinion that it had been abated by the use of a hot foot-bath every night, the last thing before going to rest[5].

In after years, when Cowper regarded with a diseased mind his own nature and the course of human life, he referred to his want of devotion during this

[5] He relied, however, upon "Elliott's medicines," whatever they may have been. In a letter to Mr. Hill (Nov. 1782), he requests a supply of them, and says, "My eyes are in general better than I remember them to have been, since I first opened them upon this sublunary stage, which is now a little more than half a century ago; yet I do not think myself safe either without those remedies, or when, through long keeping, they

illness, as showing that at that early age his heart had become proof against the ordinary means a gracious God employs for our chastisement. "Though I was severely handled," he says, "by this disease, and in imminent danger, yet neither in the course of it, nor during my recovery, had I any sentiments of contrition, any thought of God, or eternity. On the contrary, I was scarcely raised from the bed of pain and sickness, before the emotions of sin became more violent than ever, and the devil seemed rather to have gained, than lost, an advantage over me; so readily did I admit his suggestions, and so passive was I under them. By this time I became such an adept in the infernal art of lying, that I was seldom guilty of a fault for which I could not invent an apology capable of deceiving the wisest. These, I know, are called school-boys' tricks; but a total depravity of principle, and the work of the father of lies, are universally at the bottom of them."

A Roman Catholic is never likely to exaggerate either the sum or the character of his offences when he confesses them to his priest, because he knows that the rate of penance will be fixed in proportion; but in Protestant countries, both hypocrites and enthusiasts practise the same kind of exaggerated self condemnation; the former because it is a part easily acted to

have in part lost their virtue. I seldom use them without thinking of our trip to Maidenhead, where I first experienced their efficacy." .. "Every time I feel the least uneasiness in either eye, I tremble, lest my Æsculapius being departed, my infallible remedy should be lost for ever." (To the same, Dec. 7, 1782.)

deceive others, the latter because they deceive themselves, and think they are promoting the cause of religion while they magnify the miracle of their own conversion. Cowper was not one of those persons who gratify their spiritual pride by representing themselves as the vilest of sinners. Whatever he, in his deplorable state of mind, may have said or thought of his own childhood, it is certain that he had been an inoffensive, gentle boy. His temper was peculiarly mild and amiable, and his intimacies were formed with the most intellectual of his schoolfellows, .. with those who afterwards distinguished themselves in life by their attainments and their talents; these are never the worst boys, .. never those with whom a bad one becomes intimate. And when Cowper accused himself as a juvenile proficient in the "infernal art of lying," it may well be believed that he imposed upon himself in a far greater degree than he had ever imposed upon an usher, for lying is certainly not one of those vices which are either acquired or fostered at a public school.

"Religion," he says, "was neither known nor practised" in the family of the oculist with whom he was two years domesticated. Here, too, he seems to have looked back through the same distorting medium. His words can only mean that family prayers were not performed in that house. What the opinions of the family were, he could as little know as he was likely to inquire, farther than as to the place of worship which they frequented; and of their private devotions it was impossible that he could know any thing. He proceeds to say, that whatever seeds of religion he

might carry to Westminster, were all marred and corrupted there, before his seven years' apprenticeship to the classics was expired; that the duty of the schoolboy swallowed up every other, and that he acquired Latin and Greek at the expense of much more important knowledge.

It cannot be gainsaid that our boarding-schools are unfavourable to those devotional feelings, the seeds of which have been sown in early childhood, and destructive of those devotional habits which have been learned at home; that nothing which is not intentionally profane can be more irreligious than the forms of religion which are observed there, and that the attendance of schoolboys in a pack at public worship, is worse than perfunctory. This is one of the evils connected with public education, such as it long has been, still is, and is likely to continue, however earnestly endeavours may be made to amend it. It is a great evil; but Cowper did not reflect upon its natural and obvious causes, when he accounted for it by saying that the duty of the schoolboy swallowed up every other. In his days, and in my own, that duty left time enough for idleness, or recreation, or the pursuits of private study to those who were studiously disposed: the *forcing system* had not been introduced. But at no time has a schoolboy's life offered any encouragement, any inducement, any opportunity for devotion.

Much might be done to prevent or diminish the mischief incident to such institutions; but of all those mischiefs which are to be set against the great advantages belonging to them, this would be the most difficult to reach. In the natural course of human life, an

intercourse is maintained between all the different grades from infancy to old age, and each in that intercourse exercises a salutary influence upon the others: in schools boys are brought together in great numbers, and kept together apart from all influences except that of mere authority. Theirs is the stage in which, in the wise order of things, the animal part of our nature predominates over the intellectual, and in a still greater degree over the spiritual; but something more than scholastic authority is required for counteracting the effect of evil example, to which in such establishments they are inevitably exposed.

It appears from Cowper's own statement that the only part of religious instruction which fell within the province of the master was carefully inculcated. "That I may do justice," he says, "to the place of my education, I must relate one mark of religious discipline, which, in my time, was observed at Westminster; I mean the pains which Dr. Nichols took to prepare us for confirmation. The old man acquitted himself of this duty like one who had a deep sense of its importance; and I believe most of us were struck by his manner, and affected by his exhortations. Then, for the first time, I attempted to pray in secret; but being little accustomed to that exercise of the heart, and having very childish notions of religion, I found it a difficult and painful task, and was even then frightened at my own insensibility. This difficulty, though it did not subdue my good purposes till the ceremony of confirmation was passed, soon after entirely conquered them. I relapsed into a total forgetfulness of God, with all the disadvantages of being the more hardened, for being softened to no purpose."

What he remembered as the second instance of his serious impressions occurred while he was here at school. Crossing St. Margaret's churchyard late one evening, a glimmering light in the midst of it excited his curiosity, and instead of quickening his speed, and whistling to keep his courage up the while, he went to see from whence it proceeded. A gravedigger was at work there by lantern-light; and just as Cowper came to the spot, he threw up a skull, which struck him on the leg. This gave an alarm to his conscience, and he remembered the incident as among the best religious documents which he received at Westminster. The impression, as might be expected, soon wore off. "I became," he says, "so forgetful of mortality, that, strange as it may seem, surveying my activity and strength, and observing the evenness of my pulse, I began to entertain, with no small complacency, a notion that perhaps I might never die." Death, indeed, appears to us in boyhood almost as much like a dream, as life to those who are far advanced upon their mortal pilgrimage. This, however, was a very short-lived notion; for, he continues, "I was soon after struck with a lowness of spirits, uncommon at that age, and had frequently intimations of a consumptive habit. I had skill enough to understand their meaning, but could never prevail upon myself to disclose them to any one, for I thought every bodily infirmity a disgrace, especially a consumption. This messenger of the Lord, however, did his errand, and perfectly convinced me I was mortal."

The symptoms of consumption were no doubt as completely fanciful as the total depravity at the same age of which he afterwards accused himself. The ail-

ments must have been very slight which were not perceived by others, and which did not prevent him from excelling at cricket and foot-ball. It has been said that the treatment he endured at Westminster in all probability produced his insuperable aversion to public schools. But that aversion arose from what he saw and what he reflected on in after life, not from any ill usage which he experienced there. His recollections of Westminster were pleasurable. In one of his letters he says, "He who cannot look forward with comfort, must find what comfort he can in looking backward. Upon this principle I the other day sent my imagination upon a trip thirty years behind me. She was very obedient, and very swift of foot, presently performed her journey, and at last set me down in the sixth form at Westminster. I fancied myself once more a schoolboy, a period of life in which, if I had never tasted true happiness, I was at least equally[6] unacquainted with its contrary. No manufacturer of waking dreams ever succeeded better in his employment than I do; I can weave such a piece of tapestry in a few minutes as not only has all the charms of reality, but is embellished also with a variety of beauties, which, though they never existed, are more captivating than any that ever did. Accordingly I was a schoolboy in

[6] So completely is the statement contradicted that the cruelty which he underwent at Westminster, "produced an indelible recollection upon his mind through life;" that it "affords, in part, the clue by which his future circumstances are to be explained;" and that "occasional symptoms of derangement in his early youth, may, in some measure, be ascribed to the same cause." This is affirmed in the 'brief memoirs of Cowper, revised and recommended by Mr. Greatheed.'

high favour with the master, received a silver groat for my exercise, and had the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form[7] for the admiration of all who were able to understand it[8]."

This passage alone might prove that the strong disapprobation of public schools which Cowper expresses in his poems was not occasioned by any unhappiness that he had suffered at Westminster. Even when describing most forcibly the evils and dangers connected with them, he draws a picture which shows with how much pleasure he looked back upon that part of his boyhood.

> Be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,
> We love the playplace of our early days;

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[7] This custom was not practised at Westminster in the days of Dr. Vincent. But "sweet remuneration" was still dispensed in silver pence; and those pence produced still "goodlier guerdon," by an established rate of exchange at which the mistress of the boarding house received them, and returned current coin in the proportion of six to one. My first literary profits were thus obtained, and, like Cowper, I remember the pleasure with which I received them. But there was this difference, that his rewards were probably for Latin verse, in which he excelled, and mine were always for English composition. Cowper alludes to these words in his Table-Talk:—

> At Westminster, where little poets strive
> To set a distich upon six and five,
> Where discipline helps opening buds of sense,
> And makes his pupils proud with silver pence,
> I was a poet too.

[8] He adds, "Do you wish to see this highly applauded performance? It follows on the other side." Whatever it was, it had been torn off from the letter, and has perished. This is to be regretted; for whether in prose or verse, it would have been a cheerful sketch of his boyhood.

The scene is touching, and the heart is stone
That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.
The wall on which we tried our graving skill,
The very name we carved subsisting still;
The bench on which we sat while deep employ'd,
Though mangled, hack'd, and hew'd, not yet destroy'd;
The little ones, unbuttoned, glowing hot,
Playing our games, and on the very spot,
As happy as we once to kneel and draw
The chalky ring, and knuckle-down at taw;
To pitch the ball into the grounded hat,
Or drive it devious with a dextrous pat;
The pleasing spectacle at once excites
Such recollection of our own delights,
That viewing it we seem almost to obtain
Our innocent, sweet, simple years again.
This fond attachment to the well-known place
Where first we started into life's long race,
Maintains its hold with such unfailing sway,
We feel it e'en in age, and at our latest day[9].

So far indeed were the years which Cowper passed at Westminster from being years of misery, that they were probably the happiest in his life. They were years in which he was not disquieted with any foresight of the obstacles which afterwards impeded his happiness; neither had he any cause, real or imaginary, for regret, or self-reproach. He was exactly one of those boys who choose for themselves the good that may be gained at a public school, and eschew the evil, being preserved from it by their good instincts, or by the influence of virtuous principles inculcated in childhood. Being equally fond of his studies and his sports, he was a proficient in both. "When I was a boy," he says in one of his letters, "I excelled at cricket and

[9] Tirocinium.

football; but the fame I acquired by achievements that way is long since forgotten, and I do not know that I have made a figure in any thing else." The first volume of his poems was in the press when that sentence was written; and the figure which he soon afterwards made in the field of literature showed the benefit which he had derived [10] both from the discipline of Westminster and its indiscipline, .. from the instruction which a man of genius willingly imparts to an apt and docile pupil in the regular course of school-business; and from that play and exercise of the intellect which, in the little less profitable hours of school-idleness, he enjoyed with those schoolfellows who may properly be called his peers, Lloyd, Churchill, and Colman.

Among his other contemporaries at Westminster who distinguished themselves in after life, were Cumberland [11], Impey, and Hastings; for the latter he had a

[10] "Men who are partial to public schools," says Hayley, "will probably doubt if any system of private tuition could have proved more favourable to the future display of his genius than such an education as he received at Westminster. There, indeed, the peculiar delicacy of his nature might expose him to an extraordinary portion of present discomfort; yet he undoubtedly acquired the accomplishment and the reputation of scholarship, with the advantage of being known and esteemed by some aspiring youths of his own age, who were destined to become conspicuous and powerful in the splendid scene of the world."

[11] "Cumberland and I," he says, "boarded together in the same house at Westminster. He was at that time clever, and I suppose has given proof sufficient to the world that he is still clever; but of all that he has written, it has never fallen in my way to read a syllable, except perhaps in a magazine or review, the sole sources at present of all my intelligence." This was written in 1788.

particular value. His favourite school friend is said to have been Sir William Russell, the representative of a family often allied by intermarriages [12] with the Cromwells. This is the friend to whom Cowper alludes in some of the earliest of his verses which have been preserved:

> Still, still, I mourn with each returning day
> Him snatch'd by fate in early youth away.

In a letter wherein Cowper delivers a strong opinion against public education, he says, "Connexions formed at school are said to be lasting, and often beneficial. There are two or three stories of this kind upon record, which would not be so constantly cited as they are whenever this subject happens to be mentioned, if the chronicle that preserves their remembrance had many besides to boast of. For my own part, I found such friendship, though warm enough in the commencement, surprisingly liable to extinction; and of seven or eight whom I had selected for intimates, out of about three hundred, in ten years time not one was left me." This was written in a splenetic mood, induced perhaps by the neglect of some who, if they were men of letters, were also, in the worst acceptation of the phrase, men

[12] One of this family was bedchamber-woman to the Princess Amelia, and Mr. Noble relates what he calls a most excellent anecdote of her. "Frederick, the then Prince of Wales, came into the room on the 30th of January, when she was adjusting some part of the princess's dress. 'Ah! Miss Russell,' said he, 'are you not at church to endeavour to avert the judgments of Heaven from falling upon the nation for the sins of your ancestor Oliver?' To which she instantly replied, 'Is it not humiliation enough for a descendant of the great Cromwell to be pinning up the tail of your sister?'"

of the world. Some of his early intimates he had at that time lost by death; and the circumstances which drove him into retirement separated him from others, of whom, nevertheless, he continued to think with kindness and affection,.. this too in cases when he must strongly and justly have condemned the course of their lives. And in one instance that which had been no more than an acquaintance at school ripened, after an interval of many years, into esteem and friendship.

When his intention of publishing a translation of Homer was made known, and Lord Dartmouth on that occasion recalled himself to his recollection as an old schoolfellow who took a friendly interest in his success, Cowper felt for how much intellectual wealth he was indebted to that sound learning which he had brought from school. "When his lordship and I," said he, "sat side by side in the sixth form at Westminster, we little thought that in process of time one of us was ordained to give a new translation of Homer; yet at that very time it seems I was laying the foundation of this superstructure."

CHAP. II.

COWPER IN A SOLICITOR'S OFFICE, AND IN THE TEMPLE. FIRST INDICATIONS OF A DISEASED MIND. HIS EARLY FRIENDS. THURLOW. HILL. THE NONSENSE CLUB.

"At the age of eighteen," says Cowper, "being tolerably well furnished with grammatical knowledge, but as ignorant of all kinds of religion as the satchel at my back, I was taken from Westminster; and having spent about nine months at home was sent to acquire the practice of the law with an attorney." This is said in that memoir of a certain part of his life which was published several years after his death, as "detailing particularly the exercises of his mind in regard to religion; and as eminently calculated to benefit those who are labouring under a depression of mind arising from similar causes, to promote the interests of evangelical religion, and to vindicate the character of the 'Christian Poet' from the unjust and illiberal insinuations, not of his enemies, for he had none, but of the enemies of our adorable Redeemer!"

The state of mind in which he composed this brief memoir is indicated by its exaggerated language upon this point. Speaking of himself elsewhere in a calmer strain, he says, "At that time I valued a man according to his proficiency and taste in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that. I lived to see the vanity of what I had made my pride; and in a few years found that there were other attainments which

would carry a man more handsomely through life than a mere knowledge of what Homer and Virgil had left behind them. In measure as my attachment to these gentry wore off, I found a more welcome reception among those whose acquaintance it was more my interest to cultivate. But all this time was spent in painting a piece of wood that had no life in it. At last I began to think *indeed;* I found myself in possession of many baubles, but not one grain of solidity in all my treasures[1]."

Having fixed on the law for his study, or the law having been fixed on for him, he was articled for three years to a Mr. Chapman, and resided with him during that time. "Here," he says, "I might have lived and died without seeing or hearing any thing that might remind me of one single Christian duty, had it not been that I was at liberty to spend my leisure hours (which were well nigh all my time) at my aunt's, in Southampton Row. By this means I had opportunity of seeing the inside of a church, whither I went with the family on Sundays, and which probably I should otherwise never have seen[2]." He seems not to have considered that as he passed his Sunday regularly with a family that was nearly related to him, his master might well think himself under no responsibility for the manner in which he discharged the duties of the day.

The transition from the sixth form in Westminster to a solicitor's office, was likely to be as great, and as little agreeable, in the point of society as of the em-

[1] Letter to Mr. Newton, Feb. 18, 1781.
Memoir, p. 19.

ployment to be pursued there. He had, however, for fellow-clerk, no less a person than the after Lord Chancellor Thurlow, who had been educated at Canterbury school. Dr. Donne, one of the prebendaries of that cathedral, had a quarrel with Mr. Talbot, the then head master of the school, and he is said to have brought young Thurlow out of Suffolk and placed him there, as a daring, refractory, clever boy, who would be sure to torment his master[3]. This charitable intention was perfectly fulfilled, but the primary purpose of making the boy a good scholar was equally accomplished; for Thurlow was one of those persons who have the rare power of doing much while they seem to be doing nothing. There was no similarity of disposition between these youths; but there was enough of intellectual sympathy to produce at least the appearance of friendship, and on one part certainly the reality for a time. Cowper introduced his new associate to his aunt's house. Writing to Lady Hesketh many years afterwards, and reminding her of those days, he says, "I did actually live three years with Mr. Chapman, a solicitor, that is to say, I slept three years in his house; but I lived, that is to say, I spent my days, in Southampton Row, as you very well remember. There was I and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed, from morning to night, in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law. O fie, cousin! how could you do so?"

[3] I am obliged to Sir Egerton Brydges for this and some other anecdotes, in this volume. Thurlow's father, he adds, was a neighbour of Dr. Donne's, and he supposes Donne to have been related to Cowper's mother.

It is evident from this account that Cowper's condition during those years could not have been, as Hayley supposed, peculiarly irksome to his delicate feelings; and that there is no ground for assuming that it tended to promote rather than to counteract his constitutional tendency to melancholy: no such tendency had at that time manifested itself, and it has too hastily been said that the law was chosen for him without the slightest regard to his fitness or inclination. The motives for the choice are evident; his connections were such, that there was a sure prospect of his being well provided for in this profession; and he had given proof at Westminster of two of its essential qualifications, talents and diligence. The opinion that he was entirely unfitted for it by nature he sometimes entertained in after life, but it was when he considered himself as equally unfitted for any other calling. "What nature," says he, "expressly designed me for, I have never been able to conjecture, I seem to myself so universally disqualified for the common and customary occupations and amusements of mankind[4]." At other times he took blame to himself and imputed no fault to nature. Writing to a young friend who was then studying the law, he says to him, "You do well, my dear sir, to improve your opportunity; to speak in the rural phrase, this is your sowing time, and the sheaves you look for can never be yours, unless you make that use of it. The colour of our whole life is generally such as the three or four first years in which we are our own masters, make it. Then it is that we may be said to shape our own destiny, and to treasure up

[4] To Mr. Unwin, May, 1781.

for ourselves a series of future successes or disappointments. Had I employed my time as wisely as you, in a situation very similar to yours, I had never been a poet perhaps, but I might by this time have acquired a character of more importance in society; and a situation in which my friends would have been better pleased to see me. But three years mis-spent in an attorney's office were, almost of course, followed by several more equally mis-spent in the Temple; and the consequence has been, as the Italian epitaph says, '*Sto qui:*' (here I am!) The only use I can make of myself now, at least the best, is to serve *in terrorem* to others, when occasion may happen to offer, that they may escape (as far as my admonitions can have any weight with them) my folly and my fate[5]."

He had been entered at the Middle Temple (April 29, 1748) before he left school; and upon leaving the solicitor's office in his twenty-first year, and becoming, as he says, in a manner, complete master of himself, he took chambers there in 1752. And here, when he first began to live alone, that malady began, which at different times, and under different symptoms, darkened so much of his life. Its commencement he has thus described in his own melancholy Memoirs.

"I was struck, not long after my settlement in the Temple, with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair. I presently lost all relish for those studies to which I had before been closely attached; the classics had no longer any

[5] To Samuel Rose, Esq. July 23, 1789.

charms for me; I had need of something more salutary than amusement, but I had no one to direct me where to find it.

"At length I met with Herbert's Poems; and, gothic and uncouth as they were, I yet found in them a strain of piety which I could not but admire. This was the only author I had any delight in reading. I pored over him all day long; and though I found not here, what I might have found, a cure for my malady, yet it never seemed so much alleviated as while I was reading *him*. At length I was advised by a very near and dear relative, to lay him aside; for he thought such an author more likely to nourish my disorder than to remove it.

"In this state of mind I continued near a twelvemonth; when having experienced the inefficacy of all human means, I at length betook myself to God in prayer; such is the rank which our Redeemer holds in our esteem, never resorted to but in the last instance, when all creatures have failed to succour us. My hard heart was at length softened; and my stubborn knees brought to bow. I composed a set of prayers, and made frequent use of them. Weak as my faith was, the Almighty, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, was graciously pleased to hear me.

"A change of scene was recommended to me, and I embraced an opportunity of going with some friends to Southampton, where I spent several months. Soon after our arrival, we walked to a place called Freemantle, about a mile from the town; the morning was clear and calm; the sun shone bright upon the sea; and

the country on the borders of it was the most beautiful I had ever seen. We sat down upon an eminence, at the end of that arm of the sea, which runs between Southampton and the New Forest. Here it was that on a sudden, as if another sun had been kindled that instant in the heavens, on purpose to dispel sorrow and vexation of spirit, I felt the weight of all my misery taken off; my heart became light and joyful in a moment; I could have wept with transport had I been alone. I must needs believe that nothing less than the Almighty *fiat* could have filled me with such inexpressible delight; not by a gradual dawning of peace, but as it were with a flash of his life-giving countenance. I think I remember something like a glow of gratitude to the Father of mercies, for this unexpected blessing, and that I ascribed it to his gracious acceptance of my prayers. But Satan, and my own wicked heart, quickly persuaded me that I was indebted for my deliverance, to nothing but a change of scene, and the amusing varieties of the place. By this means he turned the blessing into a poison; teaching me to conclude that nothing but a continued circle of diversion, and indulgence of appetite, could secure me from a relapse.

"Upon this hellish principle, as soon as I returned to London, I burnt my prayers, and away went all thoughts of devotion and dependence upon God my Saviour. Surely it was of his mercy that I was not consumed; glory be to his grace!"

This instantaneous transition from deep and morbid melancholy, to a state of genial feeling, has been represented as a providential dispensation .. a gracious call;

and undoubtedly Cowper regarded it in that light when he drew up the narrative of his own mental sufferings. But the accuracy with which such cases are described may be sometimes questioned, even when, as in this instance, the sincerity of the individual is unquestionable. Present feeling gives a colouring to the past: and it is not more difficult for a painter in middle age to paint his own portrait from a looking-glass, not as he sees himself there, but as he was in his youth, than it is to represent faithfully an evanescent state of feeling, after an interval of many years.

It is remarkable that, often as his sea-side recollections occur in Cowper's correspondence, he never alludes to this peculiar incident, not even when speaking of the very scene, to the very person for whom, and at whose especial request, there is reason to believe this narrative was written. "I remember Southampton well," he says to Mr. Newton, "having spent much time there; but though I was young, and had no objections on the score of conscience either to dancing or cards, I never was in the assembly room in my life. I never was fond of company, and especially disliked it in the country. A walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fire-side, had always more charms for me than any other amusement that the place afforded. I was also a sailor, and being of Sir Thomas Hesketh's party, who was himself born one, was often pressed into the service. But though I gave myself an air and wore trowsers, I had no genuine right to that honour, disliking much to be occupied in great waters, unless in the finest weather. How they contrive to elude the wearisomeness that

attends a sea life, who take long voyages, you know better than I; but for my own part, I seldom have sailed so far as from Hampton river to Portsmouth, without feeling the confinement irksome, and sometimes to a degree that was almost insupportable. There is a certain perverseness, of which I believe all men have a share, but of which no man has a larger share than I; I mean that temper, or humour, or whatever it is to be called, that indisposes us to a situation, though not unpleasant in itself, merely because we cannot get out of it. I could not endure the room in which I now write, were I conscious that the door were locked. In less than five minutes I should feel myself a prisoner, though I can spend hours in it, under an assurance that I may leave it when I please, without experiencing any tedium at all. It was for this reason, I suppose, that the yacht was always disagreeable to me. Could I have stepped out of it into a corn-field or a garden, I should have liked it well enough; but being surrounded with water, I was as much confined in it as if I had been surrounded by fire, and did not find that it made me any adequate compensation for such an abridgement of my liberty. I make little doubt but Noah was glad when he was enlarged from the ark; and we are sure that Jonah was when he came out of the fish; and so was I to escape from the good sloop the Harriet."

On the 14th of June, 1754, Cowper was called to the bar; that he had taken no pains to qualify himself for his profession is certain, and it is probable that he had as little intention as inclination to pursue it, resting in indolent reliance upon his patrimonial means,

and in the likely expectation that some official appointment would be found for him in good time.

One of his then familiar friends describes the society in which Cowper was placed, in no flattering colours. "The Temple," says he, "is the barrier that divides the city and suburbs; and the gentlemen who reside there seem influenced by the situation of the place they inhabit. Templars are in general a kind of citizen courtiers. They aim at the air and mien of the drawing-room; but the holiday smartness of a 'prentice, heightened with some additional touches of the rake or coxcomb, betrays itself in every thing they do. The Temple, however, is stocked with its peculiar beaux, wits, poets, critics, and every character in the gay world; and it is a thousand pities that so pretty a society should be disgraced with a few dull fellows, who can submit to puzzle themselves with cases and reports, and have not taste enough to follow the genteel method of studying the law[6]."

In 1756 he lost his father. "At that time I was young," he says[7], "too young to have reflected much. It had never occurred to me that a parson has no fee-simple in the house and glebe he occupies. There was neither tree, nor gate, nor stile, in all that country, to which I did not feel a relation, and the house itself I preferred to a palace. I was sent for from London to attend him in his last illness, and he died just before I arrived. Then, and not till then, I felt, for the first time, that I and my native place were disunited for ever; I sighed a long adieu to fields and woods, from

[6] Connoisseur, No. 1.

[7] Letter to Mr. Rose, Oct. 19, 1787.

which I once thought I never should be parted, and was at no time so sensible of their beauties, as just when I left them all behind me, to return no more."

Three years after his father's death[8], he removed from the Middle to the Inner Temple, and purchased chambers[9] there, in an airy situation. About this time he was made a Commissioner of Bankrupts; but he was more employed with literature than law, and perhaps more with love than literature. He had fixed his affections on one of those cousins with whom he and Thurlow used to giggle and make giggle in Southampton Row,.. Theodora Jane, second daughter of his uncle, Ashley Cowper. She was an accomplished woman, her person elegant, and her understanding more than ordinarily good. Attachments formed under such circumstances, when the parties may almost be said to have grown up together, take root before they are suspected on either side. The first effect upon him was to produce a change in his manners, of which he was himself conscious; he lost that uncomfortable bashfulness, for which, in dispositions resembling his, a public school affords no cure; he paid some attention to his dress, ventured to bear a part in general

[8] Mr. Cowper had married a second wife, who survived him. She is mentioned but once in Cowper's Correspondence, and and that only incidentally, but so as to show that a not unfrequent intercourse was kept up between them. In a letter to Mr. Hill, he says, "I shall possibly now and then desire you to call at the seed-shop in your way to Westminster, though sparingly. Should I do it often, you would begin to think you had a mother-in-law at Berkhampstead."—Private Corr. i. 18.

[9] They cost him two hundred and fifty pounds.

conversation, and sometimes endeavoured to distinguish himself in it[10]. When the lady's father perceived their mutual inclination, he objected to it at first, on the score of want of means, and said to his daughter, "If you marry William Cowper, what will you do?" "Do, sir?" she replied; "wash all day, and ride out on the great dog at night!" Such an answer rather indicated a light spirit and a playful temper, than the deep affection which was really felt, and which, when it had been rendered hopeless, was faithfully retained through life. For when the passion became more serious, Mr. Ashley Cowper refused his consent, upon the ground that marriage was improper between persons so nearly related. This opinion is one of the few Romish superstitions that have survived the Reformation. But though as a general principle, it is a mere superstition, introduced by a crafty priesthood as one means for extending the power and increasing the wealth of a corrupt and profligate church; such marriages must ever be regarded as ill-omened in cases where there is an hereditary tendency to any mortal or miserable disease. There is no reason for supposing that any such tendency existed in this case; but Mr. Ashley Cowper may very probably have seen in the state of mind into which his nephew had fallen soon after he removed to the Temple, unequivocal symptoms of the affliction which afterwards befell him.

It is said, that though thus "frustrated in their wishes, the cousins did not cease to love, nor occasionally to meet," and that, though Theodora deemed her-

[10] This account he gives in one of his early poems, entitled, "Of Himself."

self bound in duty to obey her father's will in this the most important of all earthly concerns, Cowper still hoped to overcome an objection which appeared to him unreasonable, because he was not conscious and could not be told, wherein its strength consisted. The intercourse seems to have ceased when he understood that the father's determination was unalterable, and he then expressed his feelings in verses, which were sent in a letter to Theodora's sister, Lady Hesketh. The letter has perished, but the verses were preserved in her memory.

Doom'd, as I am, in solitude to waste
The present moments, and regret the past;
Deprived of every joy I valued most,
My friend torn from me, and my mistress lost;
Call not this gloom I wear, this anxious mien,
The dull effect of humour, or of spleen!
Still, still, I mourn, with each returning day,
Him[11] snatch'd by fate, in early youth away;
And her.. through tedious years of doubt and pain,
Fix'd in her choice, and faithful.. but in vain.
O prone to pity, generous, and sincere,
Whose eye ne'er yet refused the wretch a tear;
Whose heart the real claim of friendship knows,
Nor thinks a lover's are but fancied woes;
See me, ere yet my distant course half done,
Cast forth a wand'rer on a wild unknown!
See me neglected on the world's rude coast,
Each dear companion of my voyage lost!
Nor ask why clouds of sorrow shade my brow,
And ready tears wait only leave to flow;
Why all that soothes a heart from anguish free,
All that delights the happy, palls with me!

[11] Sir William Russel, the favourite friend of the young poet.

From that time Cowper and the cousin whom he had loved so dearly never met again. Many years afterward, when his intimacy with Lady Hesketh was renewed, he said to her, "I still look back to the memory of your sister, and regret her; but how strange it is, if we were to meet now, we should not know each other!" The effect on Theodora was more durable. Neither time nor absence diminished her attachment to the object of her first and only love; the poems which, while their intercourse continued, he had transcribed for her as they were composed, she carefully preserved during many years; and then, for reasons known only to herself, sent them in a sealed packet to a lady, her particular friend, with directions not to be opened till after her decease. His death perhaps, or the hopeless state into which he had sunk, rendered the sight of these relics too painful; and hoping that they might one day be incorporated[12] (as they now are) with those works which will perpetuate her beloved cousin's name; she put it out of her own power to burn them in any darker mood of mind. Often as there is cause to cen-

[12] They were printed in a small volume, with the following title, "Poems, the Early Productions of William Cowper; now first published from the originals, in the possession of James Croft, with anecdotes of the Poet, collected from letters of Lady Hesketh, written during her residence at Olney. London, 1825."

Mr. Croft says, in his Preface, that "Miss Cowper's death took place on the 22nd of last October (1824), and her friend having died a short time previous to that event, her executors sent the packet to me, with other articles, according to the direction of that lady."

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sure the want of judgement and of feeling with which posthumous writings have been published, there is more reason to regret the rashness and the carelessness with which precious papers have been destroyed.

The depression of spirits which compelled Cowper to give up his professional pursuits, and continued at times to affect him through life, has been supposed to have been partly produced by this disappointment[13]. But melancholy madness, which in women so often originates in love, or takes its type from it, is seldom found to proceed from that passion, or assume its character in men. Cowper's morbid feelings, when he began to brood over them, were of a totally different kind, and there is not the slightest allusion to this disappointment in his account of his own mental sufferings. He speaks there of his twelve years in the Temple, as having been "spent in an uninterrupted course of sinful indulgence;" and though assuredly in such words, so used by one in his state of mind, more . . much more . . "meets the ear" than "is meant," it may safely be inferred from them that no great part of that time was rendered unhappy by this cause. This, indeed, is placed beyond a doubt by a letter written in Latin[14] to his friend and fellow Templar, Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, then upon the circuit in Ireland.

"While you," he says, "are following your Rhadamanthus with more pains, as you tell me, than profit, I, who neither take pains nor hope for profit, am leading an idle, and therefore what is to me a most agreeable

[13] Mr. Croft's preface.

[14] Aug. 1758. The original will be found among the supplementary notes.

life: nor do I envy you the country, dirty as it now is, and daily deluged with unseasonable rain. Sometimes, indeed, I go into the adjacent parts of the country, to visit a friend or a lady; but it is a short journey, and such as may easily be performed on foot, or in a hired carriage, for never, unless compelled to do it, do I mount a horse, because I have a tender skin, which with little exercise of that kind suffers sorely. I lately passed three days at Greenwich; a blessed three days, and if they had been three years I should not have envied the gods their immortality. There I found that lovely and beloved little girl, of whom I have often talked to you; she is at that age, sixteen, at which every day brings with it some new beauty to her form. No one can be more modest, nor (which seems wonderful in a woman) more silent; but when she speaks, you might believe that a Muse was speaking. Woe is me that so bright a star looks to another region; having risen in the West Indies, thither it is about to return, and will leave me nothing but sighs and tears."

Without supposing that there was any thing serious in this attachment, we may believe that he would not have thus spoken of it, nor allowed it to enter his fancy, unless he had entirely overcome his former disappointment. On both occasions he found amusement and perhaps, as in later years, relief, by employing himself in light literature.

The power of versifying is sometimes hereditary; but far less frequently than a musical ear, or the painter's accuracy of eye and dexterity of hand, all which depend more evidently upon organic aptitude.

Cowper's father, his uncle Ashley, and his brother, all wrote verses. He himself had been "a dabbler in rhyme," he said, ever since he was fourteen years of age, when he began with translating an elegy of Tibullus. The earliest of his compositions that has been preserved is an imitation of the Splendid Shilling, written at Bath, in 1748, on finding the heel of a shoe: he was then in his seventeenth year, and the diction and versification are such that no one would suppose it to have been a juvenile production. During his residence in the Temple, where "according to his colloquial account, he rambled," says Hayley, "from the thorny road of jurisprudence into the primrose paths of literature and poetry, even then his native diffidence confined him to social and subordinate exertions; and though he wrote and printed both verse and prose, it was as the concealed assistant[15] of less diffident authors."

He belonged at that time to the Nonsense Club, consisting of seven Westminster men, who dined together every Thursday. Bonnell Thornton, Colman, Lloyd, and Joseph Hill were members; the latter no otherwise known than as having been Cowper's correspondent and constant friend through life,..but this is to be well known. He was a man of playful talent as well as solid practical sense. To him it is that Cowper says, looking back over an interval of more than thirty

[15] In the Monthly Review for September, 1759, William Cowper, Esq. is mentioned as one of the assistants of the Duncombes in the translation of Horace. But W. C. Esq. is also mentioned, and the initials are more likely to designate him at that time than the name at length. It is remarkable that both should occur in a list of only four names.

years[16], "The noble institution of the Nonsense Club will be forgotten, when we are gone who composed it; but I often think of your most heroic line, written at one of our meetings, and especially think of it when I am translating Homer:

To whom replied the Devil yard-long-tail'd.

There was never any thing more truly Grecian than that triple epithet; and were it possible to introduce it into either Iliad or Odyssey, I should certainly steal it."

But Hill had other sympathies with Cowper than those which grew out of school-fellowship, and were merely intellectual. He was a friend for all weathers; one with whom the pleasurable excitement of conversation might be enjoyed, but in whose presence also an inclination for silence might be indulged. The heart had little share in the intimacy between Cowper and the other members of the club;..Hill's was a cordial friendship. They had the same taste for quiet enjoyment. Hill, though he afterwards applied himself drudgingly and successfully to the law, allowed himself in those years wholesome intervals of recreation in the country, where he used to "read upon sunshiny banks, and contemplate the clouds as he lay upon his back." Long after, when he had become a man of business in his habits, Cowper, writing[17] to him at his country seat, says, "I greet you at your castle of Buen Retiro, and wish you could enjoy the unmixt pleasures of the country there; but it seems you are obliged to dash the cup with a portion of those bitters you are always swallowing in town. Well..you are

[16] June 9, 1786. [17] Aug. 10, 1780.

honourably and usefully employed; and ten times more beneficially to society, than if you were piping to a few sheep under a spreading beech, or listening to a tinkling rill. Besides, by the effect of long custom and habitual practice, you are not only enabled to endure your occupation, but even find it agreeable. I remember the time when it would not have suited you so well, to have devoted so large a part of your vacation to the objects of your profession; and you, I dare say, have not forgot what a seasonable relaxation you found, when, lying at full stretch upon the ruins of an old wall, by the seaside, you amused yourself with Tasso's Jerusalem, and the Pastor Fido. I recollect that we both pitied Mr. De Grey, when we called at his cottage at Taplow, and found, not the master indeed, but his desk, with his white-leaved folio upon it, which bespoke him as much a man of business in his retirement as in Westminster Hall. But by these steps he ascended the bench. Now he may read what he pleases, and ride where he will, if the gout will give him leave. And you who have no gout, and probably never will, when your hour of dismission comes, will, for that reason, if for no other, be a happier man than he."

Cowper was at this time fond of moving about; this, however, was rather the restlessness of a highly sensitive nature, than the activity of a healthful one; though he delighted in rural scenery, he never seems to have made any exertion for the sake of enjoying it, and he did not think the most splendid spectacle that the metropolis can afford, and which it afforded but once in the course of his life, worth the little trouble

that it would have cost him to behold it. Hill had the same indifference for such things, and they both manifested it at the coronation of George III. When Hill's sisters obtained, by Ashley Cowper's favour, a good situation for seeing that solemnity, neither their brother nor Cowper would accompany them: and when they returned, full of delight and admiration, "Well, ladies," exclaimed Hill, and Cowper joined him in the exclamation, "I am glad you were so pleased, though you have sat up all night for it!" At the illumination for the king's recovery, in 1789, these ladies, who were then "the old Mrs. Hills," retained with their youthful spirits the same passion for sights; and having in vain asked their brother to accompany them, they set out and traversed the streets that night to see what could be seen. When they returned to their brother's house in Saville Row, he greeted them with, "Well, ladies, I am glad you were so pleased." They laughed, and replied, "Why, this is just what you said to us thirty years ago!"

The incurious temper which equally characterized Cowper and his friend, was strangely combined in the former with a physical restlessness, which, till he was more than thirty years old, made it almost essential to his comfort to be perpetually in motion [18]. This, which disqualified him for the practical labours of the desk, must have disinclined him from the sedentary study of his profession, and might possibly have disabled him for it, if he had otherwise been willing to have applied himself seriously thereto. Thurlow, meantime, who, with a strong head and strong body, possessed also an

[18] Private Corr. i. 353.

invincible strength of purpose, applied himself determinately to the business of life. One evening they were drinking tea together at a lady's house in Bloomsbury, when Cowper, .. contrasting in melancholy foresight his own conduct and consequent prospects with those of his fellow idler and giggler in former days, . . said to him, "Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are!" He smiled, and replied, "I surely will." "These ladies," said Cowper, "are witnesses!" The future chancellor still smiled, and answered, "Let them be so, for I will certainly do it[19]."

This conversation occurred in 1762. A letter of Cowper's, written in the same year, shows in what state of mind he then regarded his own situation[20].

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, ESQ. AT TENDRING HALL, NEAR IPSWICH.

DEAR ROWLEY,

Your letter has taken me just in the crisis; to-morrow I set off for Brighthelmston, and there I stay till the winter brings us all to town again. This world is a shabby fellow, and uses us ill; but a few years hence there will be no difference between us and our fathers of the tenth generation upwards. I could be as splenetick as you, and with more reason, if I thought proper to indulge that humour; but my resolution is, (and I would advise you to adopt it,) never to be

[19] Hayley, ii. 166.

[20] This very curious and characteristic letter, which (except a Latin one already noticed, and addressed to the same friend) is the earliest of Cowper's that has yet appeared, is now for the first time published.

melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits. God knows how long that will be; but in the mean time *Io Triumphe!* If a great man struggling with misfortunes is a noble object, a little man that despises them is no contemptible one; and this is all the philosophy I have in the world at present. It savours pretty much of the ancient Stoic; but till the Stoics became coxcombs, they were, in my opinion, a very sensible sect.

If my resolution to be a great man was half so strong as it is to despise the shame of being a little one, I should not despair of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with all its appurtenances; for there is nothing more certain, and I could prove it by a thousand instances, than that every man may be rich if he will. What is the industry of half the industrious men in the world but avarice, and call it by which name you will, it almost always succeeds. But this provokes me, that a covetous dog who will work by candlelight in a morning, to get what he does not want, shall be praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants, rather than work like an ass to relieve them. Did you ever in your life know a man who was guided in the general course of his actions by any thing but his natural temper? And yet we blame each other's conduct as freely as if that temper was the most tractable beast in the world, and we had nothing to do but to twitch the rein to the right or the left, and go just as we are directed by others! All this is nonsense, and nothing better.

There are some sensible folks, who having great estates have wisdom enough too to spend them pro-

perly; there are others who are not less wise, perhaps, as knowing how to shift without 'em. Between these two degrees are they who spend their money dirtily, or get it so. If you ask me where they are to be placed who amass much wealth in an honest way, you must be so good as to find them first, and then I'll answer the question. Upon the whole, my dear Rowley, there is a degree of poverty that has no disgrace belonging to it; that degree of it, I mean, in which a man enjoys clean linen and good company; and if I never sink below this degree of it, I care not if I never rise above it. This is a strange epistle, nor can I imagine how the devil I came to write it: but here it is, such as it is, and much good may do you with it. I have no estate, as it happens, so if it should fall into bad hands, I shall be in no danger of a commission of lunacy. Adieu! Carr is well, and gives his love to you. Yours ever,

Sept. 2, 1762. WM. COWPER.

When Cowper wrote this letter his little patrimony was in a course of regular diminution. It was not yet so reduced as to alarm him with the apprehension of coming to the last hundred, and arriving at that stage of poverty in which persons of a certain grade in society lose their caste, because they can no longer keep up the appearance which it requires. But the sands in an hour glass appear to run faster when they begin to run low, and that he then contemplated the possible exhaustion of his means is evident. There is no proof that this was one of the causes which concurred in bringing on his disease of mind; but that disease assumed a decided

character in the following year; in spite of his philosophy there must have existed uneasiness enough on the score of his affairs to prevent any wholesome and natural cheerfulness, and forced hilarity leaves behind it a more hollow and aching sense of exhaustion than is consequent upon the excitement of wine, or even of more deleterious stimulants.

His spirits, when he was in health, were far more buoyant than ordinary men are blest with. The circumstances which tended to support them, and deferred the evil day, were the probable expectation which he had of obtaining some appointment through the influence of his connexions, the pleasure which he found in intellectual society, and the occasional occupation in which, owing to his intimacy with men of letters, he was engaged. But his literary friends were more likely to assist him in keeping up his classical acquirements, than to enlarge his knowledge, or strengthen his understanding. His own temper was so easy, and his mind, while under any control of reason, so playful, that he could not fail to be a favourite with his associates; and his amiable disposition made him always see their good qualities in the best light, and overlook their faults. But he was in dangerous company at this time; and his moral sense, acute as it was, and his religious belief,.. which however little it may then have influenced his heart, was firmly grounded in his understanding,.. might not always have preserved him from the effects of evil communications. He was removed from them just at the time when they were becoming most dangerous.

CHAP. III.

COWPER'S LITERARY ASSOCIATES AND FRIENDS. BONNELL THORNTON. COLMAN. LLOYD.

THORNTON and Colman were the most distinguished of Cowper's associates when he began to reside in the Temple. The former was four years his senior, the latter two years his junior. With Thornton, therefore, who was elected from Westminster to Christ Church, when Cowper was twelve years old, he could have formed no intimacy at school; with Colman it was otherwise, Colman and Thornton had become bosom friends at Oxford, and all three were members of the Nonsense Club.

Bonnell Thornton was the son of an apothecary in Maiden Lane, London, and was intended by his father for the medical profession. His first attempts as an author appeared in "The Student, or Oxford and Cambridge Monthly Miscellany," printed at Oxford for Mr. Newberry of St. Paul's Churchyard; a name and address once as widely circulated with the histories of Goody Two Shoes and Giles Gingerbread, and other sixpenny books in gilt covers, as it has since been with Dr. James's powders and analeptic pills. Kit Smart was the principal conductor, and Warton and Johnson were occasional contributors. Thornton afterwards commenced a periodical work, entitled "Have at ye all, or the Drury Lane Journal," in rivalry, it is said, of Fielding's "Covent Garden Journal." Fielding's has been preserved, having been incorporated in his

works; Thornton's remains have never been collected, and it is not known how long this Journal lasted: Mr. Alexander Chalmers had seen only twelve numbers. At the age of thirty he took the degree of Bachelor of Physic, and in the same year he and Colman began the "Connoisseur."

George Colman was born at Florence in 1733, when his father was British resident at the Grand Duke of Tuscany's court; a sister of his mother was married to the once well known Pulteney, Earl of Bath. Like Thornton, he was on the foundation at Westminster, though not elected into the College there till a year or two after Thornton had left it. That he was made an accomplished Latin scholar there, is certain, and not less so that he must have acquired a competent knowledge of Greek; but by his own account he worked in vain at Hebrew, and would have made little progress in any thing if the old Busbeïan process had not been systematically applied. He was elected to Christ Church in 1751, and there, while yet an under graduate, commenced with Thornton, in January, 1754, the publication of the "Connoisseur."

It was then the age of periodical essays. The "Rambler," which revived the taste for them, had been immediately followed by the "Adventurer;" that paper had not yet closed its course, and during its publication the "World" had been started with all the advantages that could be given it by the aid of noble and fashionable contributors. By such aid it had reached a sale little short of two thousand five hundred; thus exceeding what the "Spectator" had obtained. Some reliance the two friends must have placed upon

the demand for this kind of light literature,.. light it had now become almost to the total exclusion of grave, or even serious matter[1]; but their main confidence was in each other and in themselves. Thornton had been one of the contributors to the "Adventurer[2]," and Colman, at the age of twenty, had there made what was probably his first appearance in public as a prose writer. Their humour and their talents were well adapted to what they had undertaken; and Beaumont and Fletcher present what is probably the only parallel instance of literary cooperation so complete, that the portions written by the respective parties are undistinguishable. Upon taking leave of the public, in the concluding number, they say, "We have not only joined in the work, taken together, but almost every single paper is the joint product of both; and as we have laboured equally in erecting the fabric, we cannot pretend that any one particular part is the sole workmanship of either. A hint has perhaps been started by one of us, improved by the other, and still farther heightened by a happy coalition of sentiment in both; as fire is struck out by a mutual collision of flint and steel. Sometimes, like Strada's lovers conversing with the sympathetic needles, we have written papers together at fifty miles distance from each other; the first rough

[1] Johnson said that the 'Connoisseur' "wanted matter; and his opinion of the 'World' was not much higher."—*Boswell*, ii. 198.

[2] The papers which Sir John Hawkins ascribed to Dr. Bathurst have been claimed for him. Mr. Chalmers had not the least doubt that they were his; and this opinion is strongly supported by internal evidence, which is in this instance more than ordinarily conclusive.

draught or loose minutes of an essay have often travelled in the stage-coach from town to country, and from country to town; and we have frequently waited for the postman, whom we expected to bring us the remainder of a Connoisseur, with the same anxiety as we should wait for the half of a bank note, without which the other half would be of no value. These our joint labours, it may easily be imagined, would have soon broke off abruptly, if either had been too fondly attached to his own little conceits; or if we had conversed together with the jealousy of a rival, or the complaisance of a formal acquaintance, who smiles at every word that is said by his companion. Nor could this work have been carried on with so much cheerfulness and good humour on both sides, if the Two had not been as closely united as the two students whom the "Spectator" mentions, as recorded by a *Terræ Filius* at Oxford, to have had but one mind, one purse, one chamber, and one hat[3].—For our own parts we cannot but be pleased with having raised

[3] The jest occurs in a speech published by Curll, of lasting infamy, in a collection impudently entitled, *Opera Posthuma Latina Viri doctissimi et clarissimi, Roberti South.* The two friends were the Dean of Christ Church, Dr. Fell, and Dr. Allestree, the Divinity Professor: *Tanta est amicitia inter illum et Theologiæ Professorem, ut unum habeant animum, unum lectum, et quod maximum est amicitiæ signum, unum solummodo inter se habent galerum.*

An English note says, that this "Terræ Filius's speech was made by Dr. South to be spoken by Henry Hill, of Corpus Christi College, afterwards D.D. and rector of Letcombe Basset, in Berkshire, 1673; but afterwards it was spoken in July, 1674, by W. Gerard, M.A. of Wadham; for which he was expelled."

this monument of our mutual friendship; and if these essays shall continue to be read, when they will no longer make their appearance as the fugitive pieces of the week, we shall be happy in considering that we are mentioned at the same time. We have all the while gone on, as it were, hand in hand together; and while we are both employed in furnishing matter for the paper now before us, we cannot help smiling at our thus making our exit together, like the Two Kings of Brentford, smelling at one nosegay."

Cowper contributed a few papers to the "Connoisseur." One of them is upon the subject of keeping secrets; and, though written in a strain of levity, it had so good an effect upon himself, that he says, "from that day he believed he had never divulged one[4]." If he had not the same virtue of discretion before, (and so it may be inferred from such an acknowledgment,) this is a remarkable instance of the benefit that may be derived from calmly considering what our own opinions are upon any question of practical importance, before it happens directly to concern us.

He was also an occasional contributor to the "St. James's Chronicle." Thornton and Colman were two of the original proprietors of that newspaper, which at once assumed a literary character far above that of its rivals. They had both been accustomed to write in newspapers and magazines, which in those days exercised more influence than the reviews, and to which indeed men of higher character and greater ability than were engaged in the critical journals, frequently sent communications. Both had thus acquired habits of

[4] To Mr. Unwin, April 6, 1780.

desultory industry; and this had led them to indulge a disposition for playful satire, and to regard things in a ludicrous point of view, .. satisfied if they could amuse themselves and others, without any worthier aim. No writer can pursue this course without injury to his own moral and intellectual nature. There was, however, nothing like malevolence in their satire; and they rendered themselves more obnoxious to the authors whom they eclipsed, than to those against whom their ridicule was directed; .. for they levelled it sometimes against men whose merit they could not but acknowledge in their heart, as indeed they bore testimony to it in their better mind.

This humour was fostered at the Nonsense Club. At those meetings of

> Jest and youthful Jollity,
> Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
> And Laughter holding both his sides,

there can be little doubt that the two odes to Obscurity and Oblivion originated, joint compositions of Lloyd and Colman, in ridicule of Gray and Mason. They were published in a quarto pamphlet, with a vignette, in the title-page, of an ancient poet safely seated and playing on his harp; and at the end a tail-piece representing a modern poet in huge boots, flung from a mountain by his Pegasus, into the sea, and losing his tie-wig in the fall.

Little did the two wits think how small in comparison with Gray they would appear in the eyes of posterity; and that the "Bard," which was then neglected by the public, would, in the course of the next genera-

tion, become the most popular ode in the English language. The poet took this unprovoked attack in his quiet and playful way. "I have sent you," said he, in a letter to Mason, "a bloody satire, written against no less persons than you and I by name. I concluded at first it was Mr. * * *, because he is your friend, and my humble servant; but then I thought he knew the world too well to call us the favourite minions of Taste and of Fashion, especially as to odes, for to them his ridicule is confined. So it is not he, but Mr. Colman, nephew to Lady Bath, author of the 'Connoisseur,' a member of one of the inns of court, and a particular acquaintance of Mr. Garrick. What have you done to him? for I never heard his name before. He makes very tolerable fun with me, when I understand him, which is not very often; but seems more angry with you. Lest people should not understand the humour of the thing, (which indeed to do they must have our lyricisms at their fingers' ends,) letters come out in Lloyd's Evening Post to tell them who and what it was that they meant, and that it is like to produce a combustion in the literary world. So if you have any mind to *combustle* about it, well and good; for me, I am neither so literary, nor so combustible." Touching upon the subject in a letter to Dr. Wharton, about the same time, he says, "I believe his Odes sell no more than mine did; for I saw a heap of them lie in a bookseller's window, who recommended them to me as a very pretty thing."

Mason published the letter in which this passage occurs for the sake of showing how Gray felt on such occasions. "Had Mr. Pope," said he, "disregarded

the sarcasms of the many writers that endeavoured to eclipse his poetical fame, as much as Mr. Gray here appears to have done, the world would not have been possessed of a Dunciad; but it would have been impressed with a more amiable idea of its author's temper." It was easy for Gray, in the consciousness of his own superiority, to smile at the cleverness with which his manner had been imitated in a mock-lyric strain; no disparagement is implied in such burlesque; and one of his temper could more easily forgive the personal ridicule, as unjust as it was unbecoming, than the authors would forgive themselves for it when they came to years of discretion. The personal attack upon Mason was equally reprehensible, and unfounded; but his stilted style and obtrusive alliteration were not unfairly satirized; and this perhaps he felt, for his later poems were not characterised by the same faults. But if it was an act of prudence on his part to follow his friend's example, and express no resentment at an unprovoked attack, it was an act of forbearance also in him, who had both the temper and the talents for satire. Lloyd and Colman would hardly have assailed him if they had known that he was the most efficient satirist of the age; for Mason it was who by an anonymous satire exploded that barbarous fashion of Chinese taste, which most of the contemporary essayists had attacked without effect.

What was personal and injurious in these mock lyrics is now so harmless, and what was always unexceptionable in them is so good..(for they are among the very best of their kind), that whenever the works of Gray and Mason are, as they ought to be, conjointly

published, it is to be hoped these pieces will find a place in the appendix, as a trophy to their fame.

Some singular displays of practical humour proceeded from the same Club. Thornton opened an exhibition of sign-paintings in Bow Street, Covent Garden. The hint for this inoffensive drollery was taken from the annual exhibition of pictures made by the Society for the promoting of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, previous to the institution of the Royal Academy; and materials for it were easily collected at a time when, upon every improvement in the city, the sign-posts were removed as nuisances. Thornton, who had always an eye for the humours and follies of the day, had been amused by the absurd combinations which appeared in many of these street-pictures, and had made them the subject of a paper in the Adventurer[5] two years before. Following now the vein upon which he had then struck, he advertised for the same day on which the Society were to open their exhibition, an "Exhibition by the Society of Sign Painters of all the curious signs to be met with in town or country, together with such original designs as might be transmitted to them as specimens of the native genius of the nation."

Unpromising as an exhibition of daubings might now seem, "most of which had actually been hung in irons, and were nearly worn out in the service," it had no inconsiderable success, though the humour must have appeared to more advantage in the catalogue than in the collection itself. Some friendly hand announced it as the project of a well-known gentleman,

[5] No. 9.

who had in several instances displayed a most uncommon vein of humour, and who was perhaps the only person in England, (Mr. Hogarth excepted,) who could have projected or carried tolerably into execution such a scheme. "There is a whimsical drollery in all his pieces," it was said, "and a comical originality in his manner that never fail to distinguish and recommend all his undertakings. To exercise his wit and humour in an innocent laugh, and to raise that innocent laugh in others, seems to have been his chief aim in the present spectacle. The ridicule on exhibitions, if it must be accounted so, is pleasant without malevolence; and the general strokes on the common topics of satire are given with the most apparent good humour[6]."

Hogarth, in fact, had entered into the humour of the adventure, and gave a few touches in chalk where effect could be added by it: thus in the portraits of the King of Prussia and the Empress Maria Teresa, he changed the cast of their eyes so as to make them leer significantly at each other. Every pot-house politician could understand this. But the wit was altogether of the most popular kind. A pair of thick legs, in white stockings and black garters, were described in the catalogue as No. 9...the Irishman's Arms, by Patrick O'Blaney. N. B. Captain Terence O'Cutter *stood* for them.—No. 12. The Scotch Fiddle. By M'Pherson; *done from himself.*—No. 16. A Man:..nine tailors at work.—No. 27. The Spirit of Contradiction:..two brewers bearing a cask, the men going different ways.—No. 35. A Man in his Element:..a

[6] Chalmers' Preface to the "Connoisseur."

cook roasted on a spit at a kitchen-fire, and the devil basting him.—No. 36. A Man out of his Element:.. a sailor thrown from his horse, and his head striking against the ten-mile stone from Portsmouth.—No. 64. View of the Road to Paddington, with a Representation of the Deadly Never-Green, that bears fruit all the year round; the fruit at full length:..three felons on the gallows at Tyburn.—73. A Man loaded with Mischief:..a fellow with a woman, a magpie, and a monkey on his back.—"It was one of those schemes," Mr. Chalmers says, "which could not be expected to last, or to be repeated, and which the public, at a less good-humoured period, might in all probability be disposed to consider as an insult." The public, however, took it in good humour, as it was meant[7].

When a pamphlet was published in France to ridicule the writings of Rousseau, a French critic well observed, "*il est fort aisé de le faire, rien ne prêtant plus à la parodie que le sublime, soit en style, soit en action, soit en morale*[8]." Burlesque and parody are indeed easy; and the more famous the original,..

[7] Churchill, in the "Ghost," represents Fame as talking, among other topics,

> Of sign-post exhibitions, rais'd
> For laughter more than to be prais'd,
> (Though, by the way, we cannot see
> Why praise and laughter mayn't agree;)
> Where genuine humour runs to waste,
> And justly chides our want of taste,
> Censur'd like other things, though good,
> Because they are not understood.
>
> Book iii. 273—80.

[8] Bachaumont. Memoires Secrets, &c. tom. i. 305.

the more sublime, it may be added, and even the more sacred,..the easier is the unworthy, or base, or blasphemous attempt to place it in a ridiculous point of view. But burlesque is not so easy when it appeals only to the sense of humour, without any admixture of malice or wickeder ingredients. In this respect no writer had ever less reason than Bonnell Thornton to regret the indulgence of a dangerous taste for the ludicrous. Having made free with one of the arts in his Sign-post Exhibition, he took a liberty of the same inoffensive kind with the other two, in an Ode for St. Cecilia's Day, adapted to the ancient British music of the salt-box, jew's-harp, marrow-bones and cleavers, and humdrum, or hurdy-gurdy. This mock-lyric was so good in its kind, that Johnson used to praise it and repeat some of the lines in the annexed specimen, which will show the humour of this metrical performance.

RECITATIVE, *accompanied.*

The meaner melody we scorn
Which vulgar instruments afford,
Shrill flute, sharp fiddle, bellowing horn,
Rumbling bassoon, or tinkling harpsichord.

AIR, *to the Salt-Box.*

In strains more exalted the Salt-box shall join,
And clattering and battering and clapping combine;
With a rap and a tap while the hollow side sounds,
Up and down leaps the flap, and with rattling rebounds.

RECITATIVE, *to the Jew's-Harp.*

Strike, strike the soft Judaic harp;
Soft and sharp,
By teeth coercive in firm durance kept,
And lightly by the volant finger swept.

AIR.

Buzzing twangs the iron lyre,
Shrilly thrilling,
Trembling, trilling,
Whizzing with the wavering wire.

AIR, *after a grand Symphony accompanied with Marrow-bones and Cleavers.*

Hark, how the banging marrow-bones
Make clanging cleavers ring,
With a ding dong, ding dong,
Ding dong, ding dong,
Ding dong, ding dong, ding dong ding.
Raise your uplifted arms on high!
In long prolonged tones,
Let Cleavers sound
A merry merry round,
By banging Marrow-bones.

RECITATIVE, *to the Humstrum, or Hurdy-gurdy.*

Cease lighter numbers; hither bring
The undulating string
Stretch'd out, and to the tumid bladder,
In amity harmonious bound;
Then deeper swell the notes and sadder,
And let the hoarse base slowly solemn sound.

AIR.

With dead, dull, doleful, heavy hums,
With mournful moans
And grievous groans
The sober hurdy-gurdy thrums.

Thornton went through with the jest, as he did in the exhibition. The ode was set by Dr. Burney, and actually performed at Ranelagh to a crowded audience. But then the execution in some degree clashed with the design, for the singing was good; the performers were excellent musicians; the cleavers had been cast in bell-metal for the occasion, and sweet tones were

produced from the jew's-harp by a person who had acquired the art of playing it with perfect skill.

Whether or not these frolics of wanton but inoffensive humour originated in the Nonsense Club cannot now be ascertained; but there can be no doubt that they were discussed and matured in that "noble institution," which fell to pieces about the time that Cowper was withdrawn from it. He had his full share in its merriment, and would never have alluded to it, as he has done with evident pleasure in the recollection, if he had seen any reason in his sadder mind to regret his connexion with it. The whole tenour of his correspondence shows that his disposition was remarkably playful, and that his playfulness never transgressed the bounds of strict propriety. If he seldom spoke of those members who were cut off early in life, it was because it was painful on that account alone to think of them. Of the survivors Colman was often in his mind, and always remembered with kindness, except when he thought himself treated by him with a neglect which, because of that very kindness, he felt keenly; and Hill continued to be his intimate and faithful friend through life.

The friends who amused themselves in this club with banter and burlesque had, however, bonds of worthier sympathy. Cowper was born for better things; and Thornton and Colman, though they took the lead in every thing ludicrous, gave another proof of coincidence in their literary taste and occupations, not less remarkable than their joint authorship of the Connoisseur.

Colman translated Terence with admirable skill; and Thornton, when the intention was imparted to

him, conceived the design of translating Plautus in like manner, into what he called the old English measure, by which he meant the dramatic blank verse of Shakespeare and his immediate followers. He published a specimen in his friend Lloyd's magazine[9], and that specimen was followed by some able essays, " concerning the advantages of measure in modern comedies, or in translations from those of the ancients. Colman assisted him by translating one play; and it is probable that he would have lent him farther aid, if he had not at that time been much engaged in theatrical business and in composing pieces for the stage. When Thornton published two volumes of his intended version, he dedicated them to Colman, and the dedication is a pleasing memorial of that friendship which seems never to have been interrupted.

" I can never forget the time," he says, " when our literary amusements were so intimately blended, that we seemed to have one invention, one sentiment, one expression. The regularity of a periodical publication led us to a constant intercourse and communication of ideas; and whatever may be the fate of this present undertaking, I shall never repent my having dipt in ink, since it gave me an opportunity of cultivating a social as well as literary connexion with you.

" Instead of prefixing your name to this work, with the distant air of a dedication, I wished to have had it coupled along with mine in the title-page: I wanted you as a *comes jucundus*, an *agreeable companion*, in this new unbeaten track of translation, which you have so happily struck out before me.—I own, indeed, I shall feel a more than ordinary disappointment if I

[9] St. James's Magazine, December, 1762; vol. i. p. 265.

should be judged unworthy to rank with you in this humbler branch of literature; for I confess, in the pride of my heart, that one great inducement to my engaging in this task was the hope that our names would be mentioned together as the translators of Terence and Plautus; though I cannot aspire to an equal share of reputation with the author of 'The Jealous Wife,' or the joint author of 'The Clandestine Marriage.'"

Thornton only lived to publish seven of the plays, one of which was translated by Colman, and another by Mr. Warner, who continued the undertaking, and completed it in five volumes. His part is respectably executed; but Thornton's is, as far as it goes, one of the best versions in our language from any ancient author. The skill with which he has compensated, by correspondent playfulness of wit, for what it was impossible to translate, is perhaps unrivalled.

Both Thornton and Colman were men of the world, in whose society Cowper's moral and religious feelings were not likely to be strengthened; but his principles were in no danger of being corrupted or shaken by them. However little the religion in which they had been trained up may have influenced the general tenour of their lives, it retained its hold on their belief. Their writings never conveyed any thing offensive to public morals or public faith; and there is every reason to suppose that they were perfectly sincere in the contempt which they expressed for the infidelity which was at that time in vogue, and in their abhorrence of the consequences to which they clearly saw its prevalence must inevitably lead. Poor Lloyd, who was also a member of the Nonsense Club, was a much more dangerous companion.

Robert Lloyd, whose father, Dr. Pierson Lloyd, was under-master at Westminster, was of the same age and standing as Colman, and was elected to Trinity College, Cambridge, when his compeer was elected to Oxford. The father[10] was a humourist, and of course furnished, to those who were bred up under him, matter for innumerable stories, which there are now none to remember and to laugh at; unless, indeed, which is very likely, some of them have been transferred to his successors, as they may have descended to him. But he was also a kind-hearted, equal-minded, generous, good man. Cowper loved his memory, and this feeling alone, he said, prompted him to attempt a translation of some Latin verses which were spoken[11] at the Westminster election next after his decease. He had never learnt who wrote them; but I can state that they were written by Dr. Vincent, who succeeded Lloyd as under master; who, like him, was for half a century connected with the school; and who now, in like manner, lives in the grateful memory of his surviving pupils.

Happy had it been for Robert Lloyd, if, with the playful wit, the cheerful disposition, and the amiable temper of his father, he had inherited his wisdom and

[10] He was connected nearly fifty years with the school, and had, very deservedly, a pension from the king of 400*l.* a year. He died January 5, 1781, being at that time chancellor of York and portionist of Waddesdon in Buckinghamshire.

[11] I have before me the copy, in his own writing, which he sent to Mr. Unwin, with this heading, "Translation of the Latin Verses spoken in Honour of the late Dr. Lloyd, at the last Westminster Election, by W. C., who was two years under him while he was an usher, and had afterwards the happiness of his acquaintance."

his virtue. He distinguished himself at Cambridge by his talents, but not in a way to procure for himself any academical honours or advantages. One of the earliest of Cowper's existing poems is an Epistle addressed to him while he was an under-graduate, and written in his own manner, .. for that, at the age of one-and-twenty had already been formed. The verses are remarkable on another account, for the following extract contains the first intimation of the writer's morbid feelings, and his own apprehension, even then, of their consequences.

'Tis not that I design to rob
Thee of thy birth-right, gentle Bob,
For thou art born sole heir and single,
Of dear Mat Prior's easy jingle;
Nor that I mean, while thus I knit
My thread-bare sentiments together,
To show my genius or my wit,
When God and you know, I have neither;
Or such, as might be better shown
By letting poetry alone.
'Tis not with either of these views,
That I presume t' address the Muse:
But to divert a fierce banditti,
(Sworn foes to ev'ry thing that's witty!)
That, with a black, infernal train,
Make cruel inroads in my brain,
And daily threaten to drive thence
My little garrison of sense:
The fierce banditti which I mean,
Are gloomy thoughts, led on by spleen.

Having taken his degree, and leaving a character in the university which would have been forgotten as well as charitably forgiven, if his after life had given proof of reformation, Lloyd returned to Westminster as an usher. That such a situation was compatible with contentment and happiness, he knew from his

father's example; that it was not incompatible with genius, he saw in Vincent Bourne. But though circumstances must have seemed to point it out as his peculiar destination, he became impatient of its wearisome routine, and resigned it in disgust. Possibly his religious opinions were at that time unsettled, and on that account he may have abandoned all intention of entering into orders, and consequently renounced the hopes of preferment which otherwise in such a situation he might have entertained. But there is no intimation of this in his Apology; he speaks in that poem with bitterness of the intellectual drudgery, and assigns no other cause for throwing himself upon the world as a literary adventurer.

Were I at once empowered to show
My utmost vengeance on my foe,
To punish with extremest rigour,
I could inflict no penance bigger
Than, using him as learning's tool,
To make him usher of a school.
For, not to dwell upon the toil
Of working on a barren soil,
And labouring with incessant pains
To cultivate a blockhead's brains,
The duties there but ill befit
The love of letters, arts, or wit.

* * * *

For me, it hurts me to the soul
To brook confinement or control;
Still to be pinion'd down to teach
The syntax and the parts of speech;
Or, what perhaps is drudgery worse,
The links and points and rules of verse;
To deal out authors by retail,
Like penny pots of Oxford ale:

Oh 'tis a service irksome more
Than tugging at the slavish oar!
Yet such his task, a dismal truth,
Who watches o'er the bent of youth,
And while, a paltry stipend earning,
He sows the richest seeds of learning,
And tills *their* minds with proper care,
And sees them their due produce bear,
No joys, alas! his toil beguile,
His *own* lies fallow all the while.

"Yet still he's on the road," you say,
"Of learning."—Why, perhaps he may,
But turns like horses in a mill,
Nor getting on, nor standing still;
For little way his learning reaches,
Who reads no more than what he teaches.

Poor Lloyd had some misgivings before he ventured upon the perilous profession of authorship. For when one of his friends advised him to try his fortune with the public, he replied in a manner which seemed to show a proper regard to prudential considerations, as well as a just estimate of his own talents.

You say I should get fame. I doubt it:
Perhaps I am as well without it;
For what's the worth of empty praise?
What poet ever dined on bays?
And though the laurel, rarest wonder!
May screen us from the stroke of thunder,
This mind I ever was and am in,
It is no antidote to famine.

* * * *

Tempt me no more then to the crime
Of dabbling in the font of rhyme:
My muse has answer'd all her end
If her productions please a friend.
The world is burden'd with a store;
Why need I add one scribbler more?

But though Lloyd never appears to have overrated himself, and knew that he was never likely to undertake, still less to execute, any thing of great pith and moment, he was tempted by the desire of that reputation which so many mistake for fame, and which those authors who have no worthier object than immediate profit or present applause, prefer to it. His earliest pieces appeared in the "Connoisseur," and the friendly editor did not let pass the fair opportunity of praising them. This was before he left Cambridge, and in one of his communications to that paper, he says, "You must know, sir, that in the language of our old dons, every young man is ruined who is not an arrant Tycho Brahe or Erra Pater. Yet it is remarkable, that though the servants of the muses meet with more than ordinary discouragement at this place, Cambridge has produced many celebrated poets; witness Spenser, Milton, Cowley, Dryden, &c.; not to mention some admired writers of the present times. I myself, sir, am grievously suspected of being better acquainted with Homer and Virgil than Euclid or Saunderson; and am universally agreed to be ruined, for having concerned myself with hexameter and pentameter more than diameter." But Latin verses were as much in his vocation at Westminster as mathematics might be at Cambridge; and the love of classical pursuits, instead of marring his fortune there, would have materially contributed to make it.

The success which Thornton and Colman had obtained, undoubtedly raised his hopes and increased his confidence. At that time they seemed to have no farther ambition than to become conspicuous among

the wits of the age; and being conscious that he was not inferior to them in any of the qualifications which such ambition required, he was impatient to be ranked in the same class. It is not uninteresting, and possibly may not be useless, to trace the state of his mind progressively in his own poems; ephemeral as they were, they become valuable when they with perfect fidelity exhibit the feelings of a literary adventurer, who, with great talents, great industry, and many amiable qualities, fell an early victim to his own unhappy principles and conduct.

Within four years after he had declared his unwillingness to increase the number of scribblers in rhyme, he thus acknowledged the change which had taken place in his mind upon that subject:

> Whether a blessing or a curse,
> My rattle is the love of verse.
> Some fancied parts and emulation,
> Which still aspires to reputation,
> Made infant fancy plume her flight,
> And held the laurel full to sight.
> For vanity, the poet's sin,
> Had ta'en possession all within;
> And he whose brain is verse-possest,
> Is in himself as highly blest
> As he whose lines and circles vie
> With Heaven's direction of the sky.
>
> Howe'er the river rolls its tides,
> The cork upon the surface rides;
> And on ink's ocean, lightly buoy'd,
> The cork of vanity is Lloyd.
> Let *me*, too, use the common claim,
> And souse at once upon my name,
> Which some have done, with greater stress,
> Who know me and who love me less.

However ardent his aspirations for fame may have been at that time, he expressed in this poem no overweening expectations that the same path would lead with equal certainty to fortune.

> However narrowly I look
> In Phœbus's *valorem* book,
> I cannot from inquiry find
> Poets had much to leave behind.
> They had a copyhold estate
> In lands which they themselves create:
> A foolish title to a *fountain*,
> A right of common in a *mountain*.

Colman, who had already produced a popular farce, and whose well known comedy of "The Jealous Wife" was then on the point of representation, had advised Lloyd to write a play:

> That talent, George, though yet untried,
> Perhaps my genius has denied,

was the answer which, in the same epistle, he gives to the advice. Perhaps no author ever distrusted his own powers without good reason. He may in execution fall far short of his hopes and anticipations, and such of his productions as have pleased him well in one mood of mind, may in another seem to him "stale, flat, and unprofitable;" for this depends more upon the state of the stomach and the pulse, than of the judgement: but he who at the commencement distrusts his ability for what he undertakes, must as surely fail, as the timid slider falls, or the swimmer sinks if he is panic-stricken in deep water.

Lloyd was a frequenter of the theatres, and had paid

much attention to theatrical performances. He first made himself generally known, and with considerable reputation, by a poem called "The Actor," addressed to Thornton, and of sufficient length to form a quarto pamphlet. It was written with his characteristic ease, and more than his usual vigour; and the subject, though trite, was one in which what was then called "the Town" took an interest. The critical remarks upon the costume of the stage, and upon the appearance of Banquo's ghost, were more in the spirit of Kemble's age than of Garrick's; and he reprobated Foote with just and honest indignation for the libellous personalities with which his dramas were seasoned, admirable in their kind as those dramas would be, were it not for this moral sin. But though Lloyd was a good stage critic, he never judged more rightly than when he doubted his own talents for dramatic composition. By Garrick's favour, and no doubt through Colman's friendship, his "Tears and Triumph of Parnassus," an occasional interlude on the death of George II. and the accession of his successor, .. and his "Arcadia," a dramatic pastoral on the young king's marriage, .. were represented at Drury Lane: they were only not too bad for representation in those days, and would hardly be deemed good enough for it now, at the meanest of the minor theatres. The flimsiest of Metastasio's *Feste Teatrale* are not more flimsy in texture, .. the workmanship admits of no comparison: and when compared with those masques by which English poetry was enriched and English taste refined, in the halcyon days of James and Charles the First, the degradation of the drama itself is not more apparent.

But it is not by his worst performances that any author should be estimated, in whom there is any thing good. These despicable pieces served Lloyd's purpose, by supplying his necessities for a time; and we may be sure he valued them at as little as they were worth. For he was an accomplished scholar,..a man of great and ready talents, with intellectual vigour enough for higher flights than he ever essayed, if moral strength had not been wanting. His greatest misfortune was his intimacy with Churchill; yet their friendship was so sincere and generous on both sides, that it stands forth as the redeeming virtue in the mournful history of both.

CHAP. IV.

CHURCHILL. COWPER'S EARLY POLITICS. HIS ADMIRATION OF CHURCHILL.

CHARLES CHURCHILL, eldest son of the Reverend Charles Churchill, rector of Rainham, near Grays, in Essex, and many years curate and lecturer of St. John's, Westminster, was born in February, 1731, in his father's house in Vine Street. At about eight years of age he was sent to Westminster as a day-boy, his father assisting his education at home; and at the age of fifteen he went into the college there, as head of his election. There is a foolish story that when he should have been elected from that foundation to one of the universities, instead of making proper replies to the

questions propounded to him, he launched out into satirical remarks upon the abilities of the person who examined him. Another story, which has just as little truth in it, is that he was rejected at Oxford on account of his deficiency in Latin and Greek. No such deficiency could possibly be found in any one who had gone in head of an election at Westminster; the truth seems to be, that he disqualified himself by a secret marriage for the studentship, to which he must otherwise have been elected; and probably on this occasion it was that the secret was disclosed to his father[1]. It had been a Fleet marriage, and soon after it had been solemnized (if that term may be applied to such a ceremony performed under such circumstances) the father properly received the rash couple into his own house.

He was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1749, but it does not appear that he ever resided there; and after remaining with his father about twelve months, during which time his conduct is said to have been perfectly regular and domestic, he removed to Sunderland, influenced, it is said, by family reasons; but it is not known what those reasons were, nor by what resources he was supported. There, it is added, almost the whole of his time was devoted to his favourite

[1] I am withheld by want of accurate data from stating as certainty what I believe to be so. His intimacy with the young lady, whose father lived in the immediate neighbourhood of the school, commenced when he was little more than seventeen, that is in 1748, and in the ensuing year he was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge. Dr. Anderson mentions a report (undoubtedly erroneous) that he was for a short time at St. John's, then under Dr. Rutherforth.

poetical amusements, till feeling the necessity of applying to professional studies, that he might be qualified for holy orders, he pursued them for about two years with indefatigable diligence; and then, at the age of twenty-two, returned to London, to take possession of a small property in right of his wife. At the canonical age Bishop Willes (of Bath and Wells) ordained him deacon upon the curacy of Cadbury[2], in Somersetshire; thither he immediately removed; and there he is said to have carefully discharged the duties of his calling, till, in 1756, Bishop Sherlock ordained him priest, and he migrated to his father's curacy at Rainham. On both occasions the want of a degree was dispensed with, on the strength of his good character and his reputation for learning.

The cares of a family were now pressing on him; he

[2] Whether North or South, I do not find stated. The incumbent, Mr. Bailey, is spoken of as his friend.

Dr. Anderson says, "His first provision in the church was a curacy of thirty pounds a year in Wales, to which remote part of the kingdom he retired with his wife, and applied himself to the duties of his station with assiduity and cheerfulness. His behaviour gained him the love and esteem of his parishioners; and his sermons, though somewhat raised above the level of his audience, were commended and followed. But being prompted to engage in trade, to add to his income, he kept a cider warehouse, with a view of vending that commodity in the neighbouring country. In a short time he experienced the folly of this deviation from his clerical profession, and a kind of rural bankruptcy soon followed."

The last editor of Churchill's poems endeavoured to ascertain the truth of this statement, which has often been repeated: but he could find no mention of any such circumstance in the family papers which were put into his hands, and had every reason, he says, to believe that Cadbury and Rainham were the only country churches in which Churchill ever officiated as curate.

opened a school, and obtained in a short time as much encouragement as could be expected in a place not advantageously situated for such an undertaking. This was the most disagreeable pursuit in which he had ever been engaged, and he used to say that nothing but the heartfelt consciousness that he was doing his duty could have supported him through it. The trial was not long. In 1758 his good father died, and as a mark of respect for his memory, the parishioners of St. John's elected the son to succeed him in their curacy and lectureship. According to his last editor this honourable testimony to his father's worth and to his own character, became with him an additional incentive for persevering in the upright course which he had hitherto pursued. He engaged again in the business of tuition, but in a way which exempted him from any responsibility or anxieties, giving " lessons in the English tongue to the young ladies at Mrs. Dennis's boarding school, in Queen Square, Bloomsbury; and attending several young gentlemen who, having acquired competent skill in the dead languages, were desirous of receiving some assistance in forming their taste and directing their studies with respect to the classical authors of antiquity." The same biographer says that he performed his parochial duties at this time with the utmost punctuality, and that in the pulpit he was plain, rational, and emphatic.

He, however, describes himself as an inert pastor and soporific preacher at that time; " whilst," in his own words .. (and they are some of the last verses that he composed),

—— I kept those sheep,
Which for my curse I was ordain'd to keep,

Ordain'd, alas! to keep through need, not choice, ..
Those sheep which never heard their shepherd's voice,
Which did not know, yet would not learn their way,
Which stray'd themselves, yet grieved that I should stray;
Those sheep which my good father .. (on his bier
Let filial duty drop the pious tear ..)
Kept well, yet starved himself; even at that time,
Whilst I was pure and innocent of rhyme,
Whilst, sacred dulness ever in my view,
Sleep at my bidding crept from pew to pew[3].

The fact was, that if Churchill had at any time given his mind to his profession (of which his sermons contain no proof), his heart was never in it. He had now begun to feel cravings of an ambition for which in that profession there was no scope; he disliked what was to him its drudgery, and perhaps was becoming impatient of its restraints. He had also causes for serious unhappiness in the temper and conduct of his wife, who had equal or more reason for complaint on a similar score; and their joint imprudence occasioned a growing weight of embarrassments, which brought him to the brink of ruin, so that he lived in constant fear of an arrest, and was compelled to secrete himself from his creditors. How deeply he felt the misery of such a condition he has himself thus forcibly expressed:

And at this hour those wounds afresh I feel,
Which nor prosperity nor time can heal;
Those wounds which, fate severely hath decreed,
Mentioned, or thought of, must for ever bleed;
Those wounds, which humbled all that pride of man
Which brings such mighty aid to virtue's plan.
Once, awed by fortune's most oppressive frown,
By legal rapine to the earth bowed down,

[3] Dedication to his Sermons.

My credit at last gasp, my state undone,
Trembling to meet the shock I could not shun,
Virtue gave way, and black despair prevail'd.
Sinking beneath the storm, my spirits fail'd,
Like Peter's faith; but one, a friend indeed,
(May all distress find such in time of need!)
One kind, good man, in act, in word, in thought,
By virtue guided, and by wisdom taught,
Image of Him whom christians should adore,
Stretch'd forth his hand, and brought me safe to shore.

That "kind, good man" was Dr. Lloyd, who interposed with the creditors, persuaded them to accept of five shillings in the pound, and advanced part of the sum required for extricating him upon this composition. It is certain that he would not have thus come forward as Churchill's friend, unless he had seen in him much more to admire and love, as well as to pity and excuse, than there then was to condemn. One consequence of Churchill's appointment to the curacy of St. John's had been the renewal of his acquaintance with Lloyd the son; more than an acquaintance it could not have been at school, because there was a difference of two years standing between them; it now ripened into friendship, and this also may be concluded that the father, at this time, saw no evil to be apprehended from their intimacy. He knew what the character of the boy had been, and no one could foresee the change which was about to take place in the man.

But two men who were both conscious of talents, ambitious of distinction, and discontented with their situations in life, were dangerous companions for each other. Had either of them been blessed with moral strength and with religious principles, by which alone

such strength can be rendered secure, both might, probably, at this crisis have been saved. But Lloyd had led a licentious life; and Churchill was beginning, in place of that faith whereby our happiness here and hereafter is assured, to entertain a system of earthly and sensual philosophy, which, if it has since been more insolently avowed in this country, has not yet been displayed with such flagitious profligacy as in those days. At what time he became a speculative infidel is not known; but it appears that there had been no open immorality in his conduct before his embarrasments, nor any cause for suspecting it. Pecuniary distress seems, by his own testimony, to have made him first plunge into excesses; and the arrangement which relieved had not the effect of reclaiming him. Once having relaxed the bonds of self-restraint, he broke loose. His home then became a scene of continual discord whenever he returned to it; just but irritating reproaches provoked him to recrimination, for which, it is said, there was too much cause; and these disgraceful disputes ended, in February, 1761, in a total separation.

At this time he had begun to try his fortune as a poet. The first production which he offered to the booksellers was entitled "The Bard," in Hudibrastic verse; it was rejected without hesitation; and as he, who was little scrupulous what he published, could never be induced to bring this forward when his name would have given it vogue, it is evident that his own opinion of its worthlessness agreed with that which had disappointed his first hopes. A satire upon the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, called "The Conclave,"

was his next attempt, Dr. Zachary Pearse, afterwards Bishop of Rochester, being then the Dean. The characters are said to have been "nervously drawn, boldly coloured, and nicely discriminated;" that it was poignant and sarcastic may be easily believed; but it was so personal, and probably indeed so libellous, that the lawyer whose opinion was taken upon it, pronounced that it could not be printed without danger of a prosecution. This second disappointment made him seek for a safer subject, and one of more general interest. Lloyd's recent success with "The Actor" suggested the thought of "The Rosciad;" and after two months close attendance at the theatres, Churchill completed that poem. He offered it to several booksellers, but none could be found to give him five guineas, which he had fixed upon as its price. On this occasion, however, he confided in his own opinion of its merit, and in that of the friends to whom it had been shown; and relying also upon the attractiveness of the subject, he ventured to publish it on his own account, which, in his circumstances, was no trifling hazard. It was published in March, 1761, without the author's name.

The Rosciad is said to have occasioned a greater sensation in the public mind than had ever before been excited by any poetical performance. If this were to be literally understood, a severer reproach could not be cast upon the taste and feeling of the British nation. When the Progress of Poetry and the Bard were published, four years before, the reviewers regretted that Gray should choose thus to seek for fame among the learned, and exert his talents in efforts which "at best, could amuse only the few, instead of

studying the people;" and they presumed he would not be greatly disappointed if he found the public backward in commending a performance not entirely suited to their apprehensions[4]. Collins's "Odes" were at that very time covered with dust and cobwebs in the warehouse of the unlucky publisher. And we are told, that when Churchill affixed his name to the second edition of "The Rosciad," "he sprang, at one bound, from the most perfect obscurity to the first rank in literary fame!".. Fame were indeed a bubble if it could spring up so suddenly, and burst so soon!

The poem, on its first appearance, was ascribed, in "the Critical Review," to Lloyd, with a degree of confidence in the critic's own discernment, and of personal insolence which has not often been surpassed by any modern professor of the ungentle craft. It was not in any spirit of emulation, still less of rivalry, that Churchill had entered upon the same field as his friend, nor is it to be believed that Lloyd partook, even for a moment, of any feeling akin to envy. The poem had no sooner been ascribed to him than he disclaimed it, by an advertisement in the newspaper; and when it was owned by Churchill, he generously and publicly acknowledged his own inferiority.

> For me who labour with poetic sin,
> Who often woo the Muse I cannot win,
> Whom Pleasure first a willing poet made,
> And Folly spoilt, by taking up the trade,
> Pleased I behold superior genius shine,
> Nor tinged with envy, wish that genius mine;

[4] Monthly Review, Sept. 1757.

> To Churchill's muse can bow with decent awe,
> Admire his mode, nor make that mode my law;
> Both may perhaps have various powers to please,
> Be his the strength of numbers, mine the ease.

It has been injuriously said that Lloyd regarded with some disgust the extraordinary success of the Rosciad, which so greatly exceeded that of his own poem. They who said this were incapable of appreciating, and perhaps of understanding, the nobler parts of his character. There was neither disgust nor mortification in the natural wish that his own ticket had been drawn as good a prize, living as he now did by the precarious profits of his pen, .. a wish not that Churchill had been less fortunate, but that he himself had been equally so. And when the reviewer insulted him with the gross imputation of having been his own eulogist, that provocation was not needed to make him regard his friend's cause as his own.

But Churchill was not one of those authors who may be attacked with impunity. He knew where his strength lay, and that the public also knew it; and he speedily followed the Rosciad with his "Apology, addressed to the Critical Reviewers." This was as successful as its predecessor; and from the profits of the two he paid up his creditors to the full amount of those debts for which he had compounded, properly considering that the legal discharge could only be considered as conditionally a moral one. This was consistent with the generosity and straight-forward manliness of his character. But neither he nor Lloyd was happy; they had commenced authors by profession about the same time; and as the one had re-

nounced his scholastic employment, the other threw off the restraints of his order, and as if to show his contempt for it, appeared in a gold-laced waistcoat, a gold-laced hat, and ruffles. Both had rapidly attained the celebrity they desired, the one had no apprehension that poverty would ever overtake him in his course, and the other had opened for himself a source of immediate prosperity. Having exempted themselves from the ordinary business and ordinary duties of life, they lived as if present gratification were their sole object. Those who had been wounded by Churchill's satires, revenged themselves now by attacking him in his moral character, where alone he was vulnerable; Lloyd, whose name now was commonly associated with his, was reproached as the companion of his midnight excesses; and not enemies alone, but false friends also, who affected, if Wilkes may be believed, to pay the highest compliments to their genius, were most industrious in seizing every opportunity of condemning their conduct in private life. "These *prudent* persons," says the arch-demagogue of his day, "found a malicious pleasure in propagating the story of every unguarded hour, and in gratifying that rage after the little anecdotes of admired authors upon which small wits subsist. The curiosity of the town was fed by these people from time to time; and every dull lecturer within the bills of mortality, comforted himself that he did not keep such hours as Mr. Churchill and Mr. Lloyd!" Wilkes defends "the two English poets," as he denominates them, for passing their nights after the manner of the first men of antiquity, "who knew," he says, "how to redeem the fleeting hours from

Death's half-brother, and fellow-tyrant, 'Sleep.' They lamented the shortness and uncertainty of human life; but both only served to give a keener relish to their pleasures, and as the truest argument not to let any portion of it pass unenjoyed[5]." Wilkes ought to have known that it was among the philosophers of the porch and not of the sty, that the first men of antiquity were found!

But when Churchill thought it necessary, in his poem called Night, to defend himself and his friend against these attacks, though the defence in its general tone was a defiance to the world, it contained a mournful avowal, that they met for the sake of drowning reflection, each seeking in the other's society a refuge from himself. The motto to this piece, "*Contrarius evehor orbi*," marks the spirit in which it was conceived, but a sadder and saner feeling was confessed in the opening lines.

> When foes insult, and prudent friends dispense,
> In pity's strains, the worst of insolence,
> Oft with thee, Lloyd, I steal an hour from grief,
> And in thy social converse find relief.
> The mind, of solitude impatient grown,
> Loves any sorrows rather than her own.
>
> Let slaves to business, bodies without soul,
> Important blanks in Nature's mighty roll,
> Solemnize nonsense in the day's broad glare,
> We *night* prefer, which heals or hides our care.

At this time it was that they became intimate with Wilkes, Churchill more especially, whose bolder temper led him to take an active part in the political adventures

[5] Almon's Correspondence, &c. of Wilkes, vol. iii. p. 10.

of his new friend. Wilkes called Churchill the noblest of poets, and Churchill thought Wilkes the purest of patriots; and in this opinion each was probably as sincere as he was mistaken. Wilkes had no predilection for any thing better than his friend's poetry, though he had a depraved taste for what was worse; and Churchill had honestly taken up the political opinions which his profligate associate used as means for repairing a broken fortune. This new connection determined the character of Churchill's future life. He became Wilkes's coadjutor in the North Briton; and the publishers, when examined before the privy council on the publication of No. 45, having declared that Wilkes gave orders for the printing, and Churchill received the profits from the sale, orders were given for arresting Churchill under the general warrant. He was saved from arrest by Wilkes's presence of mind, who was in custody of the messenger when Churchill entered the room. "Good morning, Mr. Thompson," said Wilkes to him. "How does Mrs. Thompson do? Does she dine in the country?" Churchill took the hint as readily as it had been given. He replied, that Mrs. Thompson was waiting for him, and that he only came, for a moment, to ask him how he did. Then almost directly he took his leave, hastened home, secured his papers, retired into the country, and eluded all search[6].

[6] This is stated by Wilkes himself, in his second letter to the Duke of Grafton. Mr. Almon says nothing of these circumstances; but as if for the sake of contrasting his own conduct advantageously, says, that after he himself had left the house, Churchill called there, but his fear for his own personal safety

Wilkes, during his outlawry, made secret inquiries whether, if he established himself in France, the French government would favour him in his measures for annoying his own. His project was, that Churchill should join him there, and assist him as he had done in the North Briton; and he was assured that he and his friend[7] might come to France, and to Paris, as often as they pleased, and remain as long there, and that he might print there whatever he chose. "If I stay at Paris," said he, in one of his letters, "I will not be forgot in England, for I will feed the papers from time to time with gall and vinegar against the administration. I cannot express to you how much I am courted here, nor how pleased our inveterate enemies are with 'The North Briton.'"

However much Wilkes may have been gratified by such an acknowledgment of his own importance, it

would not permit him to stay a moment.—A more catch-penny work has seldom issued from the press upon the decease of a public character, than Mr. Almon's Memoirs and Correspondence of John Wilkes.

[7] The answer came from the Duc de Praslin, by the king's orders, to M. St. Foy, *premier commis des affaires etrangères*, in these words:—*Les deux illustres Jean Wilkes et Charles Churchill peuvent venir en France et à Paris aussi souvent, et pour autant de tems, qu'ils le jugeront à propos*, &c. In the same letter to his friend, agent, and tool, Mr. Humphrey Cotes, Wilkes says, "If government means peace or friendship with me, and to save their honour, I then breathe no longer hostility. And between ourselves, if they would send me ambassasador to Constantinople, it is all I should wish." He adds, "I think, however, the king can never be brought to this, though the ministry would wish it."—Almon's Correspondence, &c. vol. ii. 53, 54.

is possible that Churchill's English feelings might have revolted at a scheme which those "inveterate enemies" thought it their interest to favour. He had now become altogether a political satirist; and it was the sincerity and severity of those feelings which gave life and vigour to his poems. They followed each other with extraordinary rapidity and extraordinary success. No English poet had ever enjoyed so excessive and so short-lived a popularity; and indeed no one seems more thoroughly to have understood his own powers; there is no indication in any of his pieces that he could have done any thing better than the thing he did. To Wilkes, he said, that nothing came out till he began to be pleased with it himself; but to the public he boasted of the haste and carelessness with which his verses were poured forth.

> Had I the power, I could not have the time,
> Whilst spirits flow, and life is in her prime,
> Without a sin 'gainst pleasure, to design
> A plan, to methodize each thought, each line,
> Highly to finish, and make every grace,
> In itself charming, take new charms from place.
> Nothing of books, and little known of men,
> When the mad fit comes on, I seize the pen;
> Rough as they run, the rapid thoughts set down,
> Rough as they run, discharge them on the town[8].

Popularity which is so easily gained is lost as easily; such reputations resembling the lives of insects, whose shortness of existence is compensated by its proportion of enjoyment. He perhaps imagined that his genius would preserve his subjects, as spices preserve a mummy; and that the individuals whom he had eulogized

[8] Gotham, b. ii.

or stigmatized would go down to posterity in his verse, as an old admiral comes home from the West Indies in a puncheon of rum; he did not consider that the rum is rendered loathsome, and that the spices with which the Pharaohs and Potiphars were embalmed wasted their sweetness in the catacombs. But in this part of his conduct there was no want of worldly prudence: he was enriching himself by hasty writings, for which the immediate sale was in proportion to the bitterness and personality of the satire[9]; and unscrupulous as this was, he took care that it should not bring him within reach of the law. More sacred laws he set at defiance. The parishioners, who had invited him to succeed his father, were compelled at length to lodge a formal complaint against him for the total dereliction of his professional duties; and he resigned in consequence a cure which he could no longer have been suffered to retain.

About this time it was that he became intimate with the daughter of a tradesman in Westminster, seduced her, and prevailed on her to quit her father's house and live with him. That he had ceased to be a Christian is but too apparent, but his moral sense had not been thoroughly depraved; .. a fortnight had not

[9] It was in Churchill's time that Foote made Puff the publisher say, "Why, who the devil will give money to be told that Mr. Such-a-one is a wiser or better man than himself? No, no; 'tis quite and clean out of nature. A good sousing satire now, well powdered with personal pepper, and seasoned with the spirit of party, that demolishes a conspicuous character, and sinks him below our own level; then, then, we are pleased; then we chuckle and grin, and toss the half-crown on the counter."

elapsed before both parties were struck with sincere compunction, and through the intercession of a true friend, at their entreaty, the unhappy penitent was received by her father. It is said she would have proved worthy of this parental forgiveness, if an elder sister had not, by continual taunts and reproaches, rendered her life so miserable that in absolute despair she threw herself upon Churchill for protection. Instead of making a just provision for her, which his means would have allowed, he received her as his mistress. Under all circumstances it would be judging too severely to call this an aggravation of the crime; but he attempted not to vindicate his conduct either to himself or others. Wilkes, who was the most profligate of men, had not in this respect corrupted his better nature; and if all his other writings were forgotten, the lines in which he expressed his compunction, would deserve always to be remembered. They are in a poem called the "Conference," in which an imaginary lord and himself are the interlocutors.

L. Hath Nature (strange and wild conceit of pride!)
Distinguished thee from all her sons beside?
Doth virtue in thy bosom brighter glow,
Or from a spring more pure doth action flow?
Is not thy soul bound with those very chains
Which shackle us? or is that self which reigns
O'er kings and beggars, which in all we see
Most strong and sovereign, only weak in thee?
Fond man, believe it not! Experience tells
'Tis not thy virtue, but thy pride rebels.
Think—and for once lay by thy lawless pen,—
Think, and confess thyself like other men;
Think but one hour, and to thy conscience led
By Reason's hand, bow down and hang thy head:

Think on thy private life; recall thy youth,
View thyself now, and own with strictest truth,
That self hath drawn thee from fair virtue's way,
Farther than folly would have dared to stray,
And that the talents liberal Nature gave
To make thee free, have made thee more a slave.

C. Ah! what, my lord, hath private life to do
With things of public nature? Why to view
Would you thus cruelly those scenes unfold,
Which without pain and horror to behold,
Must speak me something more or less, than man,
Which friends may pardon, but I never can!
Look back! a thought which borders on despair,
Which human nature must, yet cannot bear.
'Tis not the babbling of a busy world,
Where praise and censure are at random hurl'd,
Which can the meanest of my thoughts control,
Or shake one settled purpose of my soul;
Free and at large might their wild curses roam,
If all, if all, alas! were well at home.
No; 'tis the tale which angry conscience tells,
When she with more than tragic horror swells
Each circumstance of guilt; when stern, but true
She brings bad actions forth into review,
And like the dread hand-writing on the wall,
Bids late remorse awake at reason's call;
Arm'd at all points, bids scorpion vengeance pass,
And to the mind holds up reflection's glass,—
The mind, which starting heaves the heart-felt groan,
And hates that form she knows to be her own.

Enough of this. Let private sorrows rest:
As to the public, I dare stand the test;
Dare proudly boast, I feel no wish above
The good of England, and my country's love[10].

This passage bears the stamp of truth, both in its confession of remorse, and in its proud profession of

[10] Conference, v. 183—202. 213—240.

political integrity. In the same poem the author imprecates upon himself, as a curse, that if he should desert his party, he might feign a false zeal for the cause of God, and use His name for some base private end,

> ——— though to His service deeply tied
> By sacred oaths, and more by will allied[11].

Formerly, he had intimated unequivocally, that when he had thrown off the gown he had thrown off with it his belief in revelation[12]: but from these expressions, it may be hoped that a sense of guilt had now brought him to a better state of mind. Churchill was no hypocrite; his temper led him at all times rather to defy public opinion than defer to it; and he was too honest either to assume a virtue that he had not, or to affect an impious hardihood when conscience troubled him.

Cowper had a higher opinion of Churchill than of any other contemporary writer. "It is a great thing," he said, "to be indeed a poet, and does not happen to more than one man in a century; but Churchill, the great Churchill, deserved that name[13]."—"It is an affair," said he, "of very little consequence, perhaps, to the well-being of mankind; but I cannot help regretting that he died so soon. Those words of Virgil,

[11] V. 253.

[12] ——blessed are the souls which know
Those pleasures which from true conversion flow,
Whether to Reason, who now rules my breast,
Or to pure faith, like Lyttelton and West.
Prophecy of Famine, v 229—232.

[13] Letter to Mr. Unwin.

upon the immature death of Marcellus, might serve for his epitaph:

> *Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neque ultra*
> *Esse sinent."*

Cowper made him, more than any other writer, his model. No two poets could be more unlike each other in habits, temper, and disposition. Their only sympathy was in a spirit of indignation, taking in both the form of satire, but which the one directed against individuals for what he deemed their political turpitude, or for offence given to himself or his friends; the other, against the prevailing sins and errors of the age. Churchill's object was to annoy those whom he disliked, Cowper's to exhort and reclaim his fellow-creatures. He, however, found something so congenial to his own taste and sentiments in the strength and manliness of Churchill's poetry, the generous love of liberty which it breathed, and its general tone of morals, that its venom and virulence seem to have given him no displeasure. No doubt he thought that the principal objects of Churchill's satire deserved the severity with which they were treated, for the flagitious profligacy of their private lives; and his own feelings went with the satirist, because his political opinions were of the same school.

"I learned when I was a boy," says he, "being the son of a staunch Whig, and a man that loved his country, to glow with that patriotic enthusiasm which is apt to break forth into poetry, or at least to prompt a person, if he has any inclination that way, to poetical endeavours. Prior's pieces of that sort were recom-

mended to my particular notice; and as that part of the present century was a season when clubs of a political character, and consequently political songs, were much in fashion, the best in that style, some written by Rowe, and, I think, some by Congreve, and many by other wits of the day, were proposed to my admiration. Being grown up, I became desirous of imitating such bright examples; and while I lived in the Temple, produced several halfpenny ballads, two or three of which had the honour to be popular[14]." .. It is to be wished these could be discovered; for the ballad is a species of composition which he tells us he was ever fond of, and to which, more than to any other, he should have addicted himself, if graver matters had not called him another way. He inherited a taste for it, he said, from his father, who succeeded well in it himself, and who lived at a time when the best pieces in that kind were produced[15].

In another letter[16], he says to Mr. Hill, " I recollect that in those happier days, when you and I could spend our evening in enumerating victories and acquisitions, that seemed to follow each other in a continued series, there was some pleasure in hearing a politician; and a man might talk away upon so entertaining a subject without danger of becoming tiresome to others, or incurring weariness himself. When poor Bob White brought in the news of Boscawen's success off the coast of Portugal, how did I leap for joy! When Hawke demolished Conflans, I was still more transported.

[14] Letter to Mr. Newton, Dec. 4, 1781.
[15] To Mr. Unwin, Aug. 4, 1783.
[16] January 3, 1782.

But nothing could express my rapture when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec."

No intimacy, however, appears to have subsisted between Cowper and Churchill, notwithstanding these points of sympathy, and their acquaintance at school, though they were of the same standing there. Churchill was not a member of the Nonsense Club; and when he threw himself upon the town he connected himself with associates of a much worse description than his old schoolfellows. He clung to Lloyd indeed, and Lloyd to him. Thornton and Colman made common cause with them as men of letters; but though not remarkable for prudence themselves, they were discreet enough not to join in their orgies, and were by no means inclined to form any intimate connexion with Wilkes after he had declared war against the government. Wilkes, moreover, thought ill of Thornton; his own vices were so open and notorious, that no room was left for any one to think worse of him than he had proclaimed himself to be: but ill opinion implies dislike, and dislikes are generally mutual. And Colman was as much attached to Thornton, as Churchill to Wilkes, and as Lloyd to Churchill.

The same, reasons, probably, withheld Cowper from forming an intimacy with Churchill, sincerely as he admired his talents. His constitution could not have withstood the excesses which Churchill braved in the strength of a robust frame, and boasted of with the audacity of a mind little less vain than it was vigorous. Cowper's head could have borne wine as well[17]; but his

[17] Speaking of a recent illness to Mr. Newton (Sept. 8, 1783), he says, "I was in no degree delirious, nor has any thing less

health required him to keep regular hours, and his disposition inclined him to a quiet life. His finer nature would have revolted from Churchill's coarseness; and if he could have endured the conversation of Wilkes in society where Wilkes was under no restraint,.. (which is not to be supposed), it would have been ruinous for him, with the prospects which he then entertained, to have brought upon himself the imputation of being a Wilkite.

It was by the acrimony and personality of his satire that Churchill made his fortune as a poet. When he passed from players to politicians,.. from the theatre to the great stage of public life,.. his subjects were inexhaustible. The poem[18] which contains most of his

than a fever really dangerous ever made me so. In this respect, if in no other, I may be said to have a strong head; and perhaps for the same reason, that wine would never make me drunk, an ordinary degree of fever has no effect upon my understanding."

[18] Gotham. Cowper admired this poem greatly. Speaking of one of Churchill's biographers, "a pitiful scribbler, who seems to have undertaken that task for which he was entirely unqualified, because it afforded him an opportunity to traduce him," and who had called this piece a catchpenny, he says, "Gotham, unless I am a greater blockhead than he, which I am far from believing, is a noble and beautiful poem, and a poem with which, I make no doubt, the author took as much pains as with any he ever wrote. Making allowance (and Dryden, perhaps, in his Absalom and Achitophel, stands in need of the same indulgence) for an unwarrantable use of scripture, it appears to me to be a masterly performance."—To Mr. Unwin (no date).

The life here spoken of is in Bell's Collection of the British Poets, the first in which Churchill was included.

better mind was the least personal of all his productions, and for that reason it had the least sale. The fault was never repeated. He made hay while the sun shone, writing as fast as the impulse moved him, and publishing as fast as he wrote. No man knew better that though the capability of becoming a poet is the gift of nature, the art of poetry requires no ordinary pains: but he submitted to none himself. Blotting and correcting were his abhorrence; he said it was "like cutting away one's own flesh." The energetic expression was remembered by his publisher, and by him repeated to Mr. D'Israeli; who heard (probably from the same authentic source) "that after a successful work he usually precipitated the publication of another, relying on its crudeness being passed over by the public curiosity which was excited by its better brother. He called this getting double pay. But Churchill," says Mr. D'Israeli, "was spendthrift of fame, and enjoyed all his revenue while he lived. Posterity owes him little, and pays him nothing[19]."

His satires, indeed, would have slept, perhaps, with their heroes, if they had not been luckily included in Bell's edition of the British Poets,..the first general collection, which, though made with little judgement and less knowledge, has been followed in this respect by subsequent collections, Johnson's only excepted: but in the supplement to Johnson's, Churchill was included, and is now considered as a regular member of the corporation of poets. To this rank he is fairly entitled. And though it might seem that his poems,

[19] Curiosities of Literature, vol. iii. p. 129, edit. 1833.

for their subjects'-sake, might properly be relegated among those which formerly used from time to time to be collected under the title of State-Poems, they are too good for this. Manly sense is their characteristic,—deriving strength of expression from indignation; and they contain redeeming passages of sound morality and permanent truth. No such ingredients enter into the old collections; there, indeed, much occasional vigour is to be found, and wit in abundance; but to characterize them generally as libellous and malignant would be to employ weak and inadequate words; they are receptacles of ordure and venom. Such collections must be consulted by those who would thoroughly understand the history and the spirit of the times to which they belong: Churchill also will have some readers of that class; but he will have more among the students of English poetry and of English literature.

While Churchill, having honourably discharged his debts, was making a provision for his family from the produce of his rapid pen; Lloyd, whose facility in composition was equal, who stood high in reputation, whose talents were of no common order, and whose industry never shrunk from its daily task, was sinking lower and lower as a literary drudge. After conducting the poetical department of a periodical publication, entitled the Library, and publishing a quarto volume of poems, for which he obtained a considerable number of subscribers, he engaged to edit the St. James's Magazine, the first number of which appeared in September, 1762, with his name on the cover; on this it seems the publisher insisted; and Lloyd, if he did not feel the cogency

of his arguments[20], felt that of his authority. Both counted upon the aid of Lloyd's literary friends.

BOOKSELLER.

You'll have assistance, and the best.
There's Churchill,—will not Churchill lend
Assistance?

AUTHOR.

Surely, to his FRIEND.

BOOKSELLER.

And then your interest might procure
Something from either CONNOISSEUR.
Colman and Thornton both will join
Their social hand, to strengthen thine:
And when your name appears in print,
Will Garrick *never* drop a hint?

AUTHOR.

True, I've indulged such hopes before,
From those you name, and many more;
And they, perhaps, again will join
Their hand, if not ashamed of mine.

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[20] BOOKSELLER.

—— a name will always bring
A better sanction to the thing;
And all your scribbling foes are such
Their censure cannot hurt you much;
And take the matter ne'er so ill,
If *you* don't print it, sir, they will.

AUTHOR.

Well, be it so. That struggle's o'er:
Nay, this shall prove one spur the more,
Pleased if success attends, if not,
I've writ my name, and made a blot.

The Puff: Introductory Dial.

Bold is the task we undertake:
The friends we wish, the work must make;
For wits, like adjectives, are known
To cling to that which stands alone.

If Lloyd was disappointed in the hopes of assistance which he thus publicly advertised, it was because they could not possibly be realized to the desired extent. He received more than might have been expected. Some contributions seem to have come from Colman; considerable ones, certainly, from Thornton; none from Churchill, who had no time to spare, but who assisted him more effectually in another way. The chief contributor was Charles Denis, to whom the first volume was dedicated, "in acknowledgment of favours received." Denis was an imitator of Lafontaine; and upon this writer and Hall Stevenson, Dr. Wolcott, popularly known in the last generation as Peter Pindar, formed his style. Wolcott had more wit and more originality; but as indecency of one kind was not marketable in his days among the general public, he seasoned his pieces with another, and directed his personal ridicule against individuals whose character or station was such that he was in no danger of receiving personal chastisement.

One communication to the St. James's Magazine[21] may be ascribed to Cowper; it is a Dissertation on the Modern Ode, signed with his initials. "A perfect Ode," composed upon the ironical directions therein given, is promised by the writer; and such an ode

[21] Vol. ii. April, 1763, pp. 118—125.

appeared in a subsequent number[22], evidently by the same person, though signed with a different initial. No earlier communication of his can be traced there; and there is none later, because when the ode appeared the crisis of his fate was at hand.

The task of supplying a monthly magazine by his own exertions, with only eleemosynary assistance, was too much for Lloyd, even with all his power of application and facility in composition. The publisher brought to his aid, in the first number, an easy resource, on which probably both had relied. "Though the author," he said, "had in his preliminary poem[23] disclaimed any assistance but the *Belles Lettres*, and chiefly depended upon the Muses, who are not always in a humour to be propitious to their suitors, it was presumed that it could be neither unacceptable to him, nor disagreeable to the reader, to vary the entertainment, and to give the most material occurrences of the month, both foreign and domestic." But this was so ill received, that it was immediately discontinued. Bonnell Thornton then came kindly to his aid. "Old friend[24]," said he, "give me leave to congratulate your readers on the improvement which you made in your last Magazine, in not retailing stale paragraphs of news, but supplying their places with original matter; though by so doing you imposed upon yourself a further task of providing materials for another half sheet. I am sensible of the

[22] Vol. iii. Nov. 1763, pp. 187—9. It is signed L. but L. is evidently the same person as W. C. and I have therefore inserted the Ode among the additional notes to this volume.

[23] The Puff. [24] Vol. i. Nov. 1762, p. 188.

difficulty you must naturally be under in being obliged to furnish such a quantity of copy for the printer every month; it is therefore incumbent on your friends and well-wishers to ease you in some measure of the burthen. One part of your plan, indeed, is admirably calculated for this purpose, and might prove a great saving to you, if properly attended to. Though we cannot all of us be writers, we may yet contribute greatly to the success as well as merit of your undertaking, by communicating such originals as must secure attention from the very name of their authors. Many such are undoubtedly preserved in the private cabinets of the curious, and in the public libraries and repositories." This letter he accompanied with two poems attributed to Dryden, and till then unpublished.

Already Lloyd began to feel the thraldom to which he had bound himself. Even in the second number these melancholy lines are found:

Oh! had it pleased my wiser betters
That I had never tasted letters,
Then no Parnassian maggots, bred
Like fancies in a madman's head,
No graspings at an idle name,
No childish hope of future fame,
No impotence of wit, had ta'en
Possession of my muse-struck brain.

Or had my birth with fortune fit,
Varnish'd the dunce, or made the wit,
I had not held a shameful place,
Nor letters paid me with disgrace.

Oh for a pittance of my own,
That I might live unsought, unknown,
Retired from all the pedant strife,
Far from the cares of bustling life;

Far from the wits, the fools, the great,
And all the little world I hate[25]!

When the far greater part of poor Lloyd's poems shall be forgotten, as they may be without injury to his memory or to literature, the passages in which he describes his own drudgery ought always to be preserved for a warning:

While duly each revolving moon,
Which often comes—God knows, too soon,
Continual plagues my soul molest,
And Magazines disturb my rest;
While scarce a night I steal to bed
Without a couplet in my head;
And in the morning, when I stir,
Pop comes a Devil, "Copy, sir!"
I cannot strive with daring flight
To reach the brave Parnassian height,
But at its foot content to stray,
In easy unambitious way,
Pick up those flowers the Muses send,
To make a nosegay for my friend.
In short, I lay no idle claim
To genius strong and noisy fame;
But with a hope and wish to please,
I write, as I would live, with ease.

FRIEND.

But you must have a fund, a mine,
Prose, poems, letters,—

AUTHOR.

Not a line!
And here, my friend, I rest secure,
He can't lose much who's always poor.
And if as now, through numbers five,
This work with pleasure kept alive,

[25] Vol. i. p. 90.

Can still its currency afford,
Nor fear the breaking of its hoard,
Can pay you, as at sundry times,
For *self*, per *Mag*, two thousand rhymes,
From whence should apprehension grow,
That *self* should fail with richer Co?[26]

No *doer* of a monthly grub,
Myself *alone* a learned *club*,
I ask my readers to no treat,
Of scientific hash'd up meat,
Nor seek to please theatric friends
With scraps of plays and odds and ends[27].

Yet after this false demonstration of cheerfulness, the same poem contains a confession that he felt both the weight and the degradation[28] of his task:

[26] It seems from hence that he had some stated assistance at this time; but nothing appears to show it.

[27] Vol. i. p. 375—6.

[28] His friends felt this for him; one of them says:

Behold, in monthly drudgery misemployed,
The wit and classic elegance of Lloyd.
How shall the bard bring fancy, doom'd to eke
With sense or nonsense through five sheets the week;
How shall he wait for those auspicious hours,
When the Muse beckons to Parnassian bowers,
And, as erewhile, informs the happy strain
With all the native ease of Flaccus' vein?
The merciless exactors, on demand,
Instant as those who Israel's servile band
Plied with Egyptian toils, no pity show;
Or smooth or turbid, still the verse must flow:
The poet's fancy, like their porter's back,
They think is ever ready for the pack.
They never felt persuasive fancy's beam
Dart on the raptured mind the enlivening gleam;

For me, once fond of author-fame,
Now forced to bear its weight and shame,
I have no time to run a race;
A traveller's my only pace.
They whom their steeds unjaded bear
About Hyde Park, to take the air,
May frisk and prance, and ride their fill,
And go all paces, which they will.
We *hackney* tits,—nay, never smile,
Who trot our stage of *thirty* mile,
Must travel in a constant plan,
And run our journey as we can[29].

The same obvious metaphor was continued in another piece, when he, poor man, had nearly reached the end of his stage:

At first the poet idly strays
Along the greensward path of praise,
Till on his journeys up and down,
To see and to be seen in town,
What with ill-natured flings and rubs
From flippant bucks and hackney scrubs,
His toils through dust, through dirt, through gravel,
Take off his appetite for travel.

These lines were written after he had ceased to conduct the Magazine, and were addressed to Dr. Kenrick, who succeeded him as editor. During eighteen months he had continued to fulfil his monthly task, though at length in such exhaustion of means and spirits, that he

---

In vain the absence of the Muse you plead,
The quota must be furnished as decreed;
Thus jaded genius writes what it must blush to read.

Lloyd printed these lines in his Magazine, only leaving a blank in the place of his own name. Vol. ii. p. 197.

[29] P. 381.

seems to have admitted any communication, however worthless, or reprehensible in a worse way. But his whole dependance had been upon this adventure. The first paper with which Thornton had supplied him was one composed upon the thought that the greater part of mankind, if they had as many lives (according to the common saying) as a cat, would wantonly throw away the eight, however careful some of them might be to preserve the last. Pursuing this fancy through various examples, he presented one which, if it excited no forebodings in Lloyd upon its first perusal, must have been recollected by him in bitterness at last.

" Suppose again (for there can be no end of such like suppositions) that I am an author; my works, indeed, I flatter myself, will live after me; but though I had all the lives of a cat, through each of them I might lead the life of a dog. My garret (we will say) has inspired me to soar so high as to attempt a sublime ode, or epic poem. I am let down by its want of sale: the beam across my chamber is very inviting, and at least the bed cords are remaining. I am afterwards lowered to humble prose: my publisher will not afford me small beer; and I choose to have my fill of water by a plunge into the river Thames. After sinking and rising, we will suppose, for eight times alternately, I at last sit down contented in a jail, to supply copy, scrap by scrap, as the printer's little imp calls for it; since, as the proverb has it, ' he must needs go when the devil drives[30].'"

In the condition here described as the last stage of a hackney writer, Lloyd found himself after his failure with the Magazine; he was arrested for debts con-

[30] St. James's Mag. vol. i. p. 140.

tracted during its progress, and it must be presumed either that they were beyond his father's ability to discharge, or that his imprudent habits were deemed incorrigible, or that it was hoped he might be brought by confinement to a better mind; for Dr. Lloyd, who had so benevolently interposed to save Churchill from imprisonment, did not procure his son's enlargement, and he has never been charged with want of parental feeling on that score. And now Churchill's friendship was shown. On his return from a summer excursion in Wales with his mistress, whom he now considered as a left-handed wife, united to him by moral ties, he hastened to the Fleet prison, provided for his immediate wants, supplied him with a guinea a week, as well as a servant; and endeavoured to raise a subscription for the purpose of extricating him from his embarrassments. Lloyd was not wanting to himself; he continued to drudge as before; completed, with Denis's assistance, a translation of Marmontel's *Contes Moraux*, which had been commenced in the Magazine, and performed any miserable work on which the booksellers would employ him. Whatever his reflections might be, he expressed no sorrow for the folly he had committed in throwing himself upon the world as an author: "confinement was irksome enough," he said, "but not so bad as being usher at Westminster." Yet this strain shows that he had his bitter thoughts:

> The harlot muse so passing gay
> Bewitches only to betray.
> Though for awhile with easy air
> She smooths the rugged brow of care,
> And laps the mind in flowery dreams,
> With fancy's transitory gleams;

Fond of the nothings she bestows,
We wake at last to real woes.
Through every age, in every place,
Consider well the poet's case;
By turns protected and caress'd,
Defamed, dependent, and distress'd.
The joke of wits, the bane of slaves,
The curse of fools, the butt of knaves;
Too proud to stoop for servile ends,
To lacquey rogues, or flatter friends;
With prodigality to give,
Too careless of the means to live;
The bubble fame intent to gain,
And yet too lazy to maintain;
He quits the world he never prized,
Pitied by few, by more despised,
And lost to friends, oppress'd by foes,
Sinks to the nothing whence he rose.

O glorious trade! for wit's a trade,
Where men are ruined more than made!
Let crazy Lee, neglected Gay,
The shabby Otway, Dryden gray,
Those tuneful servants of the Nine,
(Not that I blend their names[31] with mine,)

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[31] Churchill connected it with a far greater than any of these:—

. . . . . twenty fools of note
Start up, and from report Mecænas quote.
They mention him as if to use his name
Was in some measure to partake his fame,
Though Virgil, was he living, in the street
Might rot for them, or perish in the Fleet.
See how they redden, and the charge disclaim!
Virgil, and in the Fleet! forbid it shame!—
Hence, ye vain boasters, to the Fleet repair,
And ask,—with blushes ask,—if Lloyd is there!

Independence, 369—80.

Repeat their lives, their works, their fame,
And teach the world some useful shame.

The scheme for releasing him by means of a subscription failed, and was so managed, or mismanaged, as to produce a breach with Thornton and Colman, upon whom, especially the former[32], much obloquy has been cast on this account. The magazine, however, had been disgraced with so much ribaldry and rubbish, and such grossly offensive personalities before it was transferred to another editor, that a regard to their

[32] In the last edition of Churchill's works it is said, "His confinement was the more irksome, owing to the circumstance of his bosom-friend and prime seducer from the paths of prudence, Bonnel Thornton, refusing to become his security for the liberty of the rules. This giving rise to some ill-natured altercation, farther irritated Thornton, who became an inveterate enemy, in the quality of his most inexorable creditor."—Vol. ii. p. 347.

Now Thornton could not have been his seducer at school, because there was nine years difference in age between them; nor at college, because they were not of the same university; and if Lloyd did not lead so licentious a life at Cambridge as to be noted for it, his biographers have belied him. That part of the charge against Thornton therefore is disposed of; and that it should have been made with so little reflection affords reason for hoping that the remaining charges may have as little foundation. Lloyd says, in a letter to Wilkes, after Churchill's death, "Thornton *is what you thought him.* I have many acquaintances, but now no friend here." That they were alienated from each other is certain, and that Lloyd had learnt to think ill of him; but when Thornton is spoken of as an inexorable creditor, it may be suspected that because he had done much, more was expected from him; and that when he had gone as far or farther than his own means could well afford, he found himself like the man in the old print, who having lent his money to his friend, lost both in consequence.

own characters might have produced some coolness upon their part towards one with whom it was no longer creditable to be associated in public opinion; and as he was connecting himself more closely with Wilkes, they may perhaps also have deemed it no longer safe. Garrick and Hogarth are in like manner charged with having "coolly abandoned him to his fate," though he had "so frequently berhymed and bepraised them." But Hogarth was then at open war with Wilkes and Churchill; and Garrick was endeavouring at that very time to render Lloyd an essential service in his own way, by bringing out at Drury Lane a comic opera, which he had manufactured from the French.

This piece, called "The Capricious Lovers," was represented for the first time on the 28th of November, 1764, with some applause; its success or failure was then alike indifferent to the unhappy author: for on the 4th of that month, Churchill, who had gone to Boulogne, there to meet Wilkes, was cut off by a miliary fever. Lloyd had been apprized of his danger; but when the news of his death was somewhat abruptly announced to him as he was sitting at dinner, he was seized with a sudden sickness, and saying, "I shall follow poor Charles," took to his bed, from which he never rose again; dying, if ever man did, of a broken heart. The tragedy did not end here: Churchill's favourite sister, who is said to have possessed much of her brother's sense and spirit and genius, and to have been betrothed to Lloyd, attended him during his illness; and, sinking under the double loss, soon followed her brother and her lover to the grave.

CHAP. V.

COWPER'S LITERARY AMUSEMENTS IN THE TEMPLE. RISE AND PROGRESS OF HIS INSANITY, AS RELATED BY HIMSELF.

DURING his residence in the Temple, Cowper, though he exercised himself in only the lighter branches of composition, took more than ordinary pains to keep up his classical knowledge. While the greater part of his schoolfellows forgot at College (like their peers there) the little they had learnt at school, he, who was apparently an idler, and was considered such by others, and perhaps considered himself so, was unconsciously preparing himself for the great literary labour of his life.

He had read through the Iliad and Odyssey at Westminster with Sutton, afterwards Sir Richard; and it is a proof of the good instinct and good sense which guided him in the choice of his friends, that he should have associated himself in his private studies with the youth of whom higher expectations were formed than of any of his contemporaries, and who was not more remarkable for abilities and attainments than for his amiable manners and excellent disposition. He went through these poems again in the Temple with a friend, Alston by name, and compared Pope's translation throughout with the original. They were not long in discovering "that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely destitute as a taste for Homer:" nevertheless they persevered in the comparison, though so disgusted at finding, "when they looked for the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his

English representation, puerile conceits instead, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position," that they were often on the point of burning the meretricious version. Little less than thirty years afterwards, Cowper reminded a fellow Templar, who had been familiar with Alston and himself, of their Homeric studies, and telling him that the recollection of those studies had led him to undertake his own translation, he observed, "We are strange creatures, my little friend; every thing that we do is in reality important, though half that we do seems to be push-pin: consequences follow that were never dreamt of[1]."

Homeric as his taste was at this time, Cowper nevertheless assisted his brother in translating the Henriade into heroic couplets for some periodical work. The translation did not extend beyond eight books, of which he supplied four, and his brother received twenty guineas for their joint labours. Cowper attached so little value to this performance, that he had forgotten the extent of his own contribution; but it was brought back to his recollection three or four and twenty years afterwards by an accurate statement in the Gentleman's Magazine[2].

[1] Letter to Clotworthy Rowley, Esq. Feb. 21, 1788.

[2] Letter to Lady Hesketh, Jan. 16, 1786. He had again forgotten the amount when he mentioned the subject to Hayley. Hayley had discovered a rival, and he thought probably an inferior translation, published as this is supposed to have been, in a Magazine; but the version of the two brothers he was unable to find. That which he found is likely to be one in which Lloyd was engaged, the first canto of such a translation being published in his works.

But sad thoughts were now crowding upon Cowper. He was now in the thirty-second year of his age, his patrimony was well-nigh spent, and (to use his own words) there was no appearance that he should ever repair the damage by a fortune of his own getting. He began to be a little apprehensive of approaching want; and under that apprehension, talking one day of his affairs with a friend, he expressed his hope that if the clerk of the journals of the House of Lords should die, his kinsman Major Cowper, who had the place in his disposal, would give him the appointment. "We both agreed," says he, "that the business of the place being transacted in private would exactly suit me; and both expressed an earnest wish for his death, that I might be provided for. Thus did I covet what God had commanded me not to covet; and involved myself in still deeper guilt by doing it in the spirit of a murderer. It pleased the Lord to give me my heart's desire, and in it and with it an immediate punishment of my crime."

This is a passage which might be quoted to illustrate "that mood of mind which exaggerates, and still more greatly mistakes the inward depravation of man[3]." Nothing can be more certain than that when Cowper chose the law for his profession, both his father and himself reckoned upon their family patronage as one reason for this choice. In the ordinary and proper course of things it would be bestowed upon him. The fault which Cowper had committed .. (grievous enough for its probable consequences to be called a sin,) .. was that of neglecting those professional studies by which he

[3] Coleridge's Table Talk, vol. i. p. 175.

might not only have maintained himself till the contingency should fall, but render himself independent of it if any unforeseen event should disappoint his reasonable expectations. That the wish whereof he accuses himself amounted to any thing more than what every one feels who looks for promotion by seniority, or for any other advantage accruing upon the decease of some person whose death would otherwise be to him a matter of mere indifference, is what no one can believe. Common nature is not so depraved as to form murderous wishes for such motives. But when Cowper wrote the narrative of what have been called "the most remarkable and interesting parts of his life," and detailed therein "the exercises of his mind in regard to religion," "for the gratification," as has been said, "of his most intimate and pious friends," the train of thought to which he was led tended greatly to induce a return of the malady, over the remains of which those injudicious friends encouraged him thus to brood.

The clerk of the journals died, as had probably been expected, shortly afterwards; and at the same time the joint offices of reading clerk and clerk of the committees, which were of much greater value than the clerkship of the journals, were vacated by resignation. Major Cowper, "the patentee of these appointments," fulfilled on this occasion the expectations which had always been entertained. "I pray God to bless him," says Cowper, "for his benevolent intention to serve me. He called me out of my chambers, and having invited me to take a turn with him in the garden, there made me an offer of the two most profitable places; intending the other for his friend Mr. Arnold. Dazzled

by so splendid a proposal, and not immediately reflecting upon my incapacity to execute a business of so public a nature, I at once accepted it; but at the same time, (such was the will of Him whose hand was in the whole matter,) seemed to receive a dagger in my heart. The wound was given, and every moment added to the smart of it. All the considerations, by which I endeavoured to compose my mind to its former tranquillity, did but torment me the more; proving miserable comforters and counsellors of no value. I returned to my chambers thoughtful and unhappy; my countenance fell; and my friend was astonished, instead of that additional cheerfulness he might so reasonably expect, to find an air of deep melancholy in all I said or did.

"Having been harassed in this manner by day and night, for the space of a week, perplexed between the apparent folly of casting away the only visible chance I had of being well provided for, and the impossibility of retaining it, I determined at length to write a letter to my friend, though he lodged in a manner at the next door, and we generally spent the day together. I did so, and therein begged him to accept my resignation, and to appoint Mr. Arnold to the places he had given me, and permit me to succeed Mr. Arnold. I was well aware of the disproportion between the value of his appointment and mine; but my peace was gone; pecuniary advantages were not equivalent to what I had lost; and I flattered myself, that the clerkship of the journals would fall fairly and easily within the scope of my abilities. Like a man in a fever, I thought a change of posture would relieve my pain; and, as the

event will show, was equally disappointed. At length I carried my point, my friend, in this instance, preferring the gratification of my desires to his own interest; for nothing could be so likely to bring a suspicion of bargain and sale upon his nomination, which the Lords would not have endured, as his appointment of so near a relative to the least profitable office, while the most valuable was allotted to a stranger.

"The matter being thus settled, something like a calm took place in my mind. I was, indeed, not a little concerned about my character; being aware, that it must needs suffer, by the strange appearance of my proceeding. This, however, being but a small part of the anxiety I had laboured under, was hardly felt, when the rest was taken off. I thought my path to an easy maintenance was now plain and open, and for a day or two was tolerably cheerful. But, behold, the storm was gathering all the while; and the fury of it was not the less violent, for this gleam of sunshine.

"In the beginning, a strong opposition to my friend's right of nomination began to show itself. A powerful party was formed among the Lords to thwart it, in favour of an old enemy of the family, though one much indebted to its bounty; and it appeared plain, that if we succeeded at last, it would only be by fighting our ground by inches. Every advantage, I was told, would be sought for, and eagerly seized, to disconcert us. I was bid to expect an examination at the bar of the house, touching my sufficiency for the post I had taken. Being necessarily ignorant of the nature of that business, it became expedient that I should visit the office daily, in order to qualify myself for the strictest scrutiny. All the horror of my fears and perplexities now

returned. A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me, as this intelligence. I knew, to demonstration, that upon these terms the clerkship of the journals was no place for me. To require my attendance at the bar of the house, that I might there publicly entitle myself to the office, was, in effect, to exclude me from it. In the mean time, the interest of my friend, the honour of his choice, my own reputation and circumstances, all urged me forward; all pressed me to undertake that which I saw to be impracticable. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves, on any occasion, is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation; others can have none.

"My continual misery at length brought on a nervous fever: quiet forsook me by day, and peace by night; a finger raised against me, was more than I could stand against. In this posture of mind, I attended regularly at the office; where, instead of a soul upon the rack, the most active spirits were essentially necessary for my purpose. I expected no assistance from any body there, all the inferior clerks being under the influence of my opponent; and accordingly I received none. The journal books were indeed thrown open to me; a thing which could not be refused; and from which, perhaps, a man in health, and with a head turned to business, might have gained all the information he wanted; but it was not so with me. I read without perception, and was so distressed, that had every clerk in the office been my friend, it could have availed me little; for I was not in a condition to receive instruction, much less to elicit it out of manuscripts, without direction. Many months went over me thus

employed; constant in the use of means, despairing as to the issue.

"The feelings of a man, when he arrives at the place of execution, are probably much like mine, every time I set my foot in the office, which was every day, for more than half a year together.

"At length the vacation being pretty far advanced, I made shift to get into the country, and repaired to Margate."

One of his letters written at this time, and only one, has been preserved; it was to his cousin Harriet, whose name will be inseparably and most honourably associated with his as long as his shall be remembered, and who was then the wife of Sir Thomas Hesketh.

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAR COUSIN, *The Temple, Aug. 9, 1763.*

Having promised to write to you, I make haste to be as good as my word. I have a pleasure in writing to you at any time, but especially at the present, when my days are spent in reading the Journals, and my nights in dreaming of them. An employment not very agreeable to a head that has long been habituated to the luxury of choosing its subject, and has been as little employed upon business, as if it had grown upon the shoulders of a much wealthier gentleman. But the numskull pays for it now, and will not presently forget the discipline it has undergone lately. If I succeed in this doubtful piece of promotion, I shall have at least this satisfaction to reflect upon, that the volumes I write will be treasured up with the utmost care for ages, and will last as long as the English constitution,—

a duration which ought to satisfy the vanity of any author who has a spark of love for his country. O! my good cousin! if I was to open my heart to you, I could show you strange sights; nothing, I flatter myself, that would shock you, but a great deal that would make you wonder. I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool; but I have more weakness than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world, as I am unfit for this,—and God forbid I should speak it in vanity! I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom.

My destination is settled at last, and I have obtained a furlough. Margate is the word, and what do you think will ensue, cousin? I know what you expect, but ever since I was born I have been good at disappointing the most natural expectations. Many years ago, cousin, there was a possibility I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My character is now fixed, and riveted fast upon me; and, between friends, is not a very splendid one, or likely to be guilty of much fascination.

Adieu, my dear cousin! So much as I love you, I wonder how the deuce it has happened I was never in love with you. Thank Heaven that I never was, for at this time I have had a pleasure in writing to you, which in that case I should have forfeited. Let me hear from you, or I shall reap but half the reward that is due to my noble indifference.

Yours ever, and evermore,

W. C.

This letter is interesting not merely because it bears the stamp of Cowper's peculiar and admirable talent; it is important as containing his own view of his own character at that time. He tells his cousin that if she could look into his heart she would see strange sights there, much that would make her wonder, but nothing that would shock her.

At Margate he began presently to recover his spirits; this amendment he imputed to the effects of a new scene, to an intermission of his painful employment, and to cheerful company, .. which throughout life, while any thing availed, was of all things most beneficial to him. Yet for some time, though the day had passed cheerfully and without any disturbing recollection of his fears, his first waking thoughts in the morning, he says, were horrible; and he "looked forward to the winter, and regretted the flight of every moment that brought it nearer, like a man borne away by a rapid torrent into a strong sea, whence he sees no possibility of returning, and where he knows he cannot subsist." Present circumstances, however, prevailed over his insane apprehensions; and the progress of the disease was suspended till he returned to town.

About the beginning of October he was again required to attend the office, and prepare for what he called "the push." But no sooner had he resumed, or seemed to resume, his ineffectual labours, .. labours which were ineffectual only because he was possessed with the persuasion that they necessarily must be so, .. than his misery and his madness .. (for such indeed it was ..) returned.

Again, he says, "I felt myself pressed by necessity

on either side, with nothing but despair in prospect. To this dilemma was I reduced,—either to keep possession of the office to the last extremity, and by so doing expose myself to a public rejection for insufficiency, (for the little knowledge I had acquired would have quite forsaken me at the bar of the house;) or else to fling it up at once, and by this means run the hazard of ruining my benefactor's right of appointment, by bringing his discretion into question. In this situation, such a fit of passion has sometimes seized me, when alone in my chambers, that I have cried out aloud, and cursed the hour of my birth; lifting up my eyes to heaven, at the same time, not as a suppliant, but in the hellish spirit of rancorous reproach and blasphemy against my Maker. A thought would sometimes come across my mind, that my sins had perhaps brought this distress upon me,—that the hand of divine vengeance was in it; but in the pride of my heart I presently acquitted myself, and thereby implicitly charged God with injustice, saying, 'What sins have I committed to deserve this?'

"I saw plainly that God alone could deliver me; but was firmly persuaded that he would not, and therefore omitted to ask it. Indeed at *his* hands I would not; but as Saul sought to the witch, so did I to the physician, Dr. Heberden; and was as diligent in the use of drugs as if they would have healed my wounded spirit, or have made the rough places plain before me. I made, indeed, one effort of a devotional kind; for having found a prayer or two in that repository of self-righteousness and pharisaical lumber, 'the Whole Duty of Man,' I said them a few nights, but with so little expectation of prevailing that way, that I soon

laid aside the book, and with it all thoughts of God and hopes of a remedy."

In his better mind, or under the influence of a more tolerant spiritual director, Cowper would not have spoken thus unjustly and uncharitably of a good old book, which contains the substance of a course of sermons addressed in the plainest language to plain people, and setting before them those duties, which they are called upon to perform in the ordinary course of life. The author was a person of sound judgement and sober piety, who sought to make his parishioners practical Christians and not professing ones: and that he was humble-minded himself there is conclusive proof; for he concealed his name, and no inquiries have ever yet been able to ascertain it. If the book appeared to Cowper stale and unprofitable, it was because it told him nothing but what he knew before; and still more, because it was intended for sane minds. It was like wholesome food to a sick stomach, or a cup of pure spring water to one who craves for drams. "I now," he says, "began to look upon madness as the only chance remaining. I had a strong foreboding that so it would fare with me, and I wished for it earnestly, and looked forward to it with impatient expectation!" Such forebodings and wishes were indications of the actual disease.

The seeds of that disease seem to have been lurking in him since its first manifestation, nearly fourteen years before this time. According to his own account, his recovery had been instantaneous; and he thought he could remember that he had ascribed it, at the time, to God's gracious acceptance of his prayers: but Satan, and his

own wicked heart, he said, persuaded him that natural means had effected a natural cure, and the blessing was thus converted into a poison." There is a well-known saying, that the greater the sinner, the greater the saint. Perhaps no one ever drew up a narrative of his own conversion, without unconsciously seeking to exemplify that saying in his own case, by exaggerating his former depravity, for the sake of making the change appear the greater, and enhancing the miracle of divine favour; and this is done as well by those who deceive themselves, as by those who are wilfully deceiving others. Cowper represents himself as having lived in an uninterrupted course of sin, till he had obtained a complete victory over his own conscience. Sometimes, indeed, a question would arise in his mind whether it were safe to proceed in a course so utterly condemned in the word of God; he saw that it must inevitably end in destruction if the gospel were true; but he saw not by what means he might change his Ethiopian complexion, or overcome such an inveterate habit of rebellion against God. The truth is, that his conscience, when he represents it as stupified or stunned, was at that very time in a state of morbid activity.

His associates, he says, were either professed Christians, like himself, .. that is to say, persons with whom religion was nothing more than a barren belief, .. or professed infidels. He was troubled with no doubts, for he had not only been well instructed in the grounds of his faith, but had always been an industrious and diligent inquirer into the external evidence by which Christianity is supported. When he was in

company with scoffers and heard them blaspheme the Gospel, he never failed to maintain its truth vehemently, and with the confidence of one who knew the strength of his cause. "I think," said he, "I at one time went so far into a controversy of this kind as to assert that I would willingly have my right hand cut off, so that I might be enabled to live according to the Gospel. Thus I have been employed when half-intoxicated, in vindicating the truth of scripture, in the very act of rebellion against its dictates. Lamentable inconsistency of convinced judgement with an unsanctified heart! An inconsistency visible to others as well as myself; insomuch, that a deistical friend of mine cut short the matter by alleging, that if what I said were true, I was certainly damned by my own choosing."

That thought, indeed, tormented him. There was nothing in his heart which would have shocked the most tender of his friends, if its secrets had been disclosed; this was the fair testimony which he gave, when capable of giving it; but there was a want of that peace which passeth all understanding. A notion occurred to him, that were he but convinced it were worth while to obey the gospel, obedience would presently follow; but "having (in his own words) no reason to expect a miracle, and not hoping to be satisfied with any thing less, he acquiesced at length in favour of this devilish conclusion, that the only course he could take for securing his present peace, was to wrestle hard against the prospect of future misery, and resolve to banish all thoughts upon a subject on which he had thought to so little purpose." This is a state of

mind which commonly ends in suicide or madness, unless the powerful stimulant of enthusiasm effect a cure. The crisis was accelerated in Cowper's case by the affair of the clerkship; but it would not have been long delayed. The prior and subsequent manifestations of the same disease prove that it was inherent in his constitution. The persuasion that it was impossible for him to qualify himself for an easy office was a symptom of that disease; and when he hoped and expected that madness would put an end to all his perplexities, he was in fact insane. The sequel must be given in his own relation.

"My chief fear was, that my senses would not fail me time enough to excuse my appearance at the bar of the House of Lords, which was the only purpose I wanted it to answer. Accordingly the day of decision drew near, and I was still in my senses; though in my heart I had formed many wishes, and by word of mouth expressed many expectations to the contrary.

"Now came the grand temptation; the point to which Satan had all the while been driving me; the dark and hellish purpose of self-murder. I grew more sullen and reserved, fled from all society, even from my most intimate friends, and shut myself up in my chambers. The ruin of my fortune, the contempt of my relations and acquaintance, the prejudice I should do my patron, were all urged on me with irresistible energy. Being reconciled to the apprehension of madness, I began to be reconciled to the apprehension of death. Though formerly, in my happiest hours, I had never been able to glance a single thought that way, without shuddering at the idea of dissolution, I now

wished for it, and found myself but little shocked at the idea of procuring it myself. Perhaps, thought I, there is no God; or if there be, the scriptures may be false; if so, then God has no where forbidden suicide. I considered life as my property, and therefore at my own disposal. Men of great name, I observed, had destroyed themselves; and the world still retained the profoundest respect for their memories.

"But above all, I was persuaded to believe, that if the act were ever so unlawful, and even supposing Christianity to be true, my misery in hell itself would be more supportable. I well recollect too, that when I was about eleven years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder, and give him my sentiments upon the question: I did so, and argued against it. My father heard my reasons, and was silent, neither approving or disapproving; from whence I inferred, that he sided with the author against me; though all the time, I believe, the true motive for his conduct was, that he wanted, if he could, to think favourably of the state of a departed friend, who had some years before destroyed himself, and whose death had struck him with the deepest affliction. But this solution of the matter never once occurred to me, and the circumstance now weighed mightily with me.

"At this time I fell into company, at a chop-house, with an elderly, well-looking gentleman, whom I had often seen there before, but had never spoken to. He began the discourse, and talked much of the miseries he had suffered. This opened my heart to him; I freely and readily took part in the conversation. At length, self-murder became the topic; and in the re-

sult, we agreed, that the only reason why some men were content to drag on their sorrows with them to the grave, and others were not, was, that the latter were endued with a certain indignant fortitude of spirit, teaching them to despise life, which the former wanted. Another person, whom I met at a tavern, told me that he had made up his mind about that matter, and had no doubt of his liberty to die as he saw convenient; though, by the way, the same person, who has suffered many and great afflictions since, is still alive. Thus were the emissaries of the throne of darkness let loose upon me. Blessed be the Lord, who has brought much good out of all this evil! This concurrence of sentiment, in men of sense, unknown to each other, I considered as a satisfactory decision of the question; and determined to proceed accordingly.

"One evening in November, 1763, as soon as it was dark, affecting as cheerful and unconcerned an air as possible, I went into an apothecary's shop, and asked for an half ounce phial of laudanum. The man seemed to observe me narrowly; but if he did, I managed my voice and countenance, so as to deceive him. The day that required my attendance at the bar of the House, being not yet come, and about a week distant, I kept my bottle close in my side-pocket, resolved to use it when I should be convinced there was no other way of escaping. This, indeed, seemed evident already; but I was willing to allow myself every possible chance of that sort, and to protract the horrid execution of my purpose, till the last moment; but Satan was impatient of delay.

"The day before the period above mentioned ar-

rived, being at Richards' coffee-house at breakfast, I read the newspaper, and in it a letter, which the further I perused it, the more closely engaged my attention. I cannot now recollect the purport of it; but before I had finished it, it appeared demonstratively true to me, that it was a libel, or satire, upon me. The author appeared to be acquainted with my purpose of self-destruction, and to have written that letter on purpose to secure and hasten the execution of it. My mind, probably, at this time, began to be disordered; however it was, I was certainly given up to a strong delusion. I said within myself, 'your cruelty shall be gratified; you shall have your revenge!' and, flinging down the paper, in a fit of strong passion, I rushed hastily out of the room; directing my way towards the fields, where I intended to find some house to die in; or, if not, determined to poison myself in a ditch, when I could meet with one sufficiently retired.

"Before I had walked a mile in the fields, a thought struck me that I might yet spare my life; that I had nothing to do, but to sell what I had in the funds, (which might be done in an hour,) go on board a ship, and transport myself to France. There, when every other way of maintenance should fail, I promised myself a comfortable asylum in some monastery, an acquisition easily made, by changing my religion. Not a little pleased with this expedient, I returned to my chambers to pack up all that I could at so short a notice; but while I was looking over my portmanteau, my mind changed again; and self-murder was recommended to me once more in all its advantages.

"Not knowing where to poison myself, for I was liable to continual interruption in my chambers, from my laundress and her husband, I laid aside that intention, and resolved upon drowning. For that purpose, I immediately took a coach, and ordered the man to drive to Tower wharf; intending to throw myself into the river from the Custom House quay. It would be strange, should I omit to observe here, how I was continually hurried away from such places as were most favourable to my design, to others, where it must be almost impossible to execute it;—from the fields, where it was improbable that any thing should happen to prevent me, to the Custom House quay, where every thing of that kind was to be expected; and this by a sudden impulse, which lasted just long enough to call me back again to my chambers, and was immediately withdrawn. Nothing ever appeared more feasible than the project of going to France, till it had served its purpose, and then, in an instant, it appeared impracticable and absurd, even to a degree of ridicule.

"My life, which I had called my own, and claimed a right to dispose of, was kept for me by Him whose property indeed it was, and who alone had a right to dispose of it. This is not the only occasion on which it is proper to make this remark; others will offer themselves in the course of this narrative, so fairly, that the reader cannot overlook them.

"I left the coach upon the Tower wharf, intending never to return to it; but upon coming to the quay, I found the water low, and a porter seated upon some goods there, as if on purpose to prevent me. This passage to the bottomless pit being mercifully shut

against me, I returned back to the coach, and ordered it to return to the Temple. I drew up the shutters, once more had recourse to the laudanum, and determined to drink it off directly; but God had otherwise ordained. A conflict, that shook me to pieces, suddenly took place; not properly a trembling, but a convulsive agitation, which deprived me in a manner of the use of my limbs: and my mind was as much shaken as my body.

"Distracted between the desire of death, and the dread of it, twenty times I had the phial to my mouth, and as often received an irresistible check; and even at the time it seemed to me that an invisible hand swayed the bottle downwards, as often as I set it against my lips. I well remember that I took notice of this circumstance with some surprise, though it effected no change in my purpose. Panting for breath, and in an horrible agony, I flung myself back into the corner of the coach. A few drops of laudanum which had touched my lips, besides the fumes of it, began to have a stupifying effect upon me. Regretting the loss of so fair an opportunity, yet utterly unable to avail myself of it, I determined not to live; and already half dead with anguish, I once more returned to the Temple. Instantly I repaired to my room, and having shut both the outer and inner door, prepared myself for the last scene of the tragedy. I poured the laudanum into a small basin, set it on a chair by the bedside, half undressed myself, and laid down between the blankets, shuddering with horror at what I was about to perpetrate. I reproached myself bitterly with folly and rank cowardice, for having suffered the fear of death

to influence me as it had done, and was filled with disdain at my own pitiful timidity: but still something seemed to overrule me, and to say, '*Think what you are doing! Consider, and live.*'

"At length, however, with the most confirmed resolution, I reached forth my hand towards the basin, when the fingers of both hands were as closely contracted, as if bound with a cord, and became entirely useless. Still, indeed, I could have made shift with both hands, dead and lifeless as they were, to have raised the basin to my mouth, for my arms were not at all affected: but this new difficulty struck me with wonder; it had the air of a divine interposition. I lay down in bed again to muse upon it, and while thus employed, heard the key turn in the outer door, and my laundress's husband came in. By this time the use of my fingers was restored to me: I started up hastily, dressed myself, hid the basin, and affecting as composed an air as I could, walked out into the dining-room. In a few minutes I was left alone; and now, unless God had evidently interposed for my preservation, I should certainly have done execution upon myself, having a whole afternoon before me.

"Both the man and his wife having gone out, outward obstructions were no sooner removed, than new ones arose within. The man had just shut the door behind him, when the convincing Spirit came upon me, and a total alteration in my sentiments took place. The horror of the crime was immediately exhibited to me in so strong a light, that, being seized with a kind of furious indignation, I snatched up the basin, poured away the laudanum into a phial of foul water, and, not

content with that, flung the phial out of the window. This impulse, having served the present purpose, was withdrawn.

"I spent the rest of the day in a kind of stupid insensibility; undetermined as to the manner of dying, but still bent on self-murder, as the only possible deliverance. That sense of the enormity of the crime, which I had just experienced, had entirely left me; and, unless my Eternal Father in Christ Jesus had interposed to disannul my covenant with death, and my agreement with hell, that I might hereafter be admitted into the covenant of mercy, I had, by this time, been a companion of devils, and the just object of his boundless vengeance.

"In the evening, a most intimate friend called upon me, and felicitated me on a happy resolution, which he had heard I had taken, to stand the brunt, and keep the office. I knew not whence this intelligence arose, but did not contradict it. We conversed awhile, with a real cheerfulness on his part, and an affected one on mine; and when he left me, I said in my heart, I shall see him no more!

"Behold, into what extremities a *good sort of man* may fall! Such was I, in the estimation of those who knew me best: a decent outside is all a good-natured world requires. Thus equipped, though all within be rank atheism, rottenness of heart, and rebellion against the blessed God, we are said to be good enough; and if *we* are damned, alas! who shall be saved? Reverse this charitable reflection, and say, If *a good sort of man* be saved, who then shall perish? and it comes

much nearer the truth: but this is a hard saying, and the world cannot bear it.

"I went to bed to take, as I thought, my last sleep in this world. The next morning was to place me at the bar of the House, and I determined not to see it. I slept as usual, and awoke about three o'clock. Immediately I arose, and by the help of a rushlight, found my penknife, took it into bed with me, and lay with it for some hours directly pointed against my heart. Twice or thrice I placed it upright under my left breast, leaning all my weight upon it; but the point was broken off square, and it would not penetrate.

"In this manner the time passed till the day began to break. I heard the clock strike seven, and instantly it occurred to me, there was no time to be lost: the chambers would soon be opened, and my friend would call upon me to take me with him to Westminster. 'Now is the time,' thought I, 'this is the crisis; no more dallying with the love of life!" I arose, and, as I thought, bolted the inner door of my chambers, but was mistaken; my touch deceived me, and I left it as I found it. My preservation, indeed, as it will appear, did not depend upon that incident; but I mention it, to show that the good providence of God watched over me, to keep open every way of deliverance, that nothing might be left to hazard.

"Not one hesitating thought now remained, but I fell greedily to the execution of my purpose. My garter was made of a broad piece of scarlet binding, with a sliding buckle, being sewn together at the ends: by the help of the buckle, I formed a noose, and fixed it

about my neck, straining it so tight that I hardly left a passage for my breath, or for the blood to circulate; the tongue of the buckle held it fast. At each corner of the bed was placed a wreath of carved work, fastened by an iron pin, which passed up through the midst of it: the other part of the garter, which made a loop, I slipped over one of these, and hung by it some seconds, drawing up my feet under me, that they might not touch the floor; but the iron bent, and the carved work slipped off, and the garter with it. I then fastened it to the frame of the tester, winding it round, and tying it in a strong knot. The frame broke short, and let me down again.

"The third effort was more likely to succeed. I set the door open, which reached within a foot of the ceiling; by the help of a chair I could command the top of it, and the loop being large enough to admit a large angle of the door, was easily fixed so as not to slip off again. I pushed away the chair with my feet, and hung at my whole length. While I hung there, I distinctly heard a voice say three times, "*'Tis over!*" Though I am sure of the fact, and was so at the time, yet it did not at all alarm me, or affect my resolution. I hung so long that I lost all sense, all consciousness of existence.

"When I came to myself again, I thought myself in hell; the sound of my own dreadful groans was all that I heard, and a feeling, like that produced by a flash of lightning, just beginning to seize upon me, passed over my whole body. In a few seconds I found myself fallen on my face to the floor. In about half

a minute I recovered my feet; and reeling, and staggering, stumbled into bed again.

"By the blessed providence of God, the garter which had held me till the bitterness of temporal death was past, broke just before eternal death had taken place upon me. The stagnation of the blood under one eye, in a broad crimson spot, and a red circle round my neck, showed plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity. The latter, indeed, might have been occasioned by the pressure of the garter; but the former was certainly the effect of strangulation; for it was not attended with the sensation of a bruise, as it must have been, had I, in my fall, received one in so tender a part. And I rather think the circle round my neck was owing to the same cause; for the part was not excoriated, nor at all in pain.

"Soon after I got into bed, I was surprised to hear a noise in the dining-room, where the laundress was lighting a fire; she had found the door unbolted, notwithstanding my design to fasten it, and must have passed the bed-chamber door while I was hanging on it, and yet never perceived me. She heard me fall, and presently came to ask me if I was well; adding, she feared I had been in a fit.

"I sent her to a friend, to whom I related the whole affair, and dispatched him to my kinsman, at the coffee-house. As soon as the latter arrived, I pointed to the broken garter, which lay in the middle of the room; and apprized him also of the attempt I had been making.—His words were, 'My dear Mr. Cowper, you terrify me! To be sure you cannot hold the office

at this rate,—where is the deputation?' I gave him the key of the drawer where it was deposited; and his business requiring his immediate attendance, he took it away with him; and thus ended all my connexion with the Parliament office.

"To this moment I had felt no concern of a spiritual kind. Ignorant of original sin, insensible of the guilt of actual transgression, I understood neither the law nor the gospel; the condemning nature of the one, nor the restoring mercies of the other. I was as much unacquainted with Christ, in all his saving offices, as if his blessed name had never reached me. Now, therefore, a new scene opened upon me. Conviction of sin took place, especially of that just committed; the meanness of it, as well as its atrocity, was exhibited to me in colours so inconceivably strong, that I despised myself, with a contempt not to be imagined or expressed, for having attempted it. This sense of it secured me from the repetition of a crime, which I could not now reflect on without abhorrence.

"Before I arose from bed, it was suggested to me that there was nothing wanted but murder, to fill up the measure of my iniquities; and that, though I had failed in my design, yet I had all the guilt of that crime to answer for. A sense of God's wrath, and a deep despair of escaping it, instantly succeeded. The fear of death became much more prevalent in me than ever the desire of it had been.

"A frequent flashing, like that of fire, before my eyes, and an excessive pressure upon the brain, made me apprehensive of an apoplexy; an event which I

thought the more probable, as an extravasation in that part seemed likely enough to happen in so violent a struggle.

"By the advice of my dear friend and benefactor, who called upon me again at noon, I sent for a physician, and told him the fact, and the stroke I apprehended. He assured me there was no danger of it, and advised me, by all means, to retire into the country. Being made easy in that particular, and not knowing where to betake myself, I continued in my chambers, where the solitude of my situation left me at full liberty to attend to my spiritual state; a matter I had, till this day, never sufficiently thought of.

"At this time I wrote to my brother, at Cambridge, to inform him of the distress I had been in, and the dreadful method I had taken to deliver myself from it; assuring him, as faithfully as I might, that I had laid aside all such horrible intentions, and was desirous to live as long as it pleased the Almighty to spare me.

"My sins were now set in array before me. I began to see and feel that I had lived without God in the world. As I walked to and fro in my chamber, I said within myself, '*There never was so abandoned a wretch; so great a sinner.*' All my worldly sorrows seemed as though they had never been; the terrors of my mind which succeeded them seemed so great, and so much more afflicting. One moment I thought myself shut out from mercy, by one chapter; and the next, by another. The sword of the Spirit seemed to guard the Tree of Life from my touch, and

to flame against me in every avenue by which I attempted to approach it. I particularly remember that the parable of the barren fig-tree was to me an inconceivable source of anguish; I applied it to myself, with a strong persuasion in my mind, that when the Saviour pronounced a curse upon it he had me in his eye; and pointed that curse directly at me.

"I turned over all Archbishop Tillotson's sermons, in hopes to find one upon the subject, and consulted my brother upon the true meaning of it; desirous, if possible, to obtain a gentler interpretation of the matter than my evil conscience would suffer me to fasten on it. 'O Lord, thou didst vex me with all thy storms, all thy billows went over me; thou didst run upon me like a giant in the night season, thou didst scare me with visions in the night season.'

"In every book I opened I found something that struck me to the heart. I remember taking up a volume of Beaumont and Fletcher, which lay upon the table in my kinsman's lodgings, and the first sentence which I saw was this: 'The justice of the gods is in it.' My heart instantly replied, 'It is of a truth:' and I cannot but observe, that as I found something in every book to condemn me, so it was the first sentence, in general, I pitched upon. Every thing preached to *me*, and every thing preached the curse of the law.

"I was now strongly tempted to use laudanum, not as a poison, but as an opiate, to compose my spirits; to stupify my awakened and feeling mind, harassed with sleepless nights, and days of uninterrupted misery. But God, who would have nothing to interfere with

the quickening work he had begun in me, forbade it; and neither the want of rest, nor continued agony of mind could bring me to the use of it: I hated and abhorred the very smell of it.

"I never went into the street, but I thought the people stared and laughed at me, and held me in contempt; and I could hardly persuade myself, but that the voice of my conscience was loud enough for every one to hear it. They who knew me seemed to avoid me; and if they spoke to me, they seemed to do it in scorn. I bought a ballad of one who was singing it in the street, because I thought it was written on me.

"I dined alone, either at the tavern, where I went in the dark, or at the chop-house, where I always took care to hide myself in the darkest corner of the room. I slept generally an hour in the evening, but it was only to be terrified in dreams; and when I awoke, it was some time before I could walk steadily through the passage into the dining-room. I reeled and staggered like a drunken man. The eyes of man I could not bear; but when I thought that the eyes of God were upon me, (which I felt assured of,) it gave me the most intolerable anguish. If, for a moment, a book or a companion stole away my attention from myself, a flash from hell seemed to be thrown into my mind immediately; and I said within myself, 'What are these things to me, who am damned?' In a word, I saw myself a sinner altogether, and every way a sinner; but I saw not yet a glimpse of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

"The capital engine in all the artillery of Satan

had not yet been employed against me. Already overwhelmed with despair, I was not yet sunk into the bottom of the gulf. This was a fit season for the use of it; accordingly I was set to inquire, whether I had not been guilty of the unpardonable sin; and was presently persuaded that I had.

"A neglect to improve the mercies of God at Southampton, on the occasion above mentioned, was represented to me as the sin against the Holy Ghost. No favourable construction of my conduct in that instance; no argument of my brother's, who was now with me; nothing he could suggest, in extenuation of my offences, could gain a moment's admission. Satan furnished me so readily with weapons against myself, that neither scripture nor reason could undeceive me. Life appeared to me now more eligible than death, only because it was a barrier between me and everlasting burnings.

"My thoughts in the day became still more gloomy, and my night visions more dreadful. One morning, as I lay between sleeping and waking, I seemed to myself to be walking in Westminster Abbey, waiting till prayers should begin; presently I thought I heard the minister's voice, and hastened towards the choir; just as I was upon the point of entering, the iron gate under the organ was flung in my face, with a jar that made the Abbey ring; the noise awoke me; and a sentence of excommunication from all the churches upon earth could not have been so dreadful to me, as the interpretation which I could not avoid putting upon this dream.

"Another time I seemed to pronounce to myself, 'Evil, be thou my good.' I verily thought that I had adopted that hellish sentiment, it seemed to come so directly from my heart. I arose from bed to look for my prayer-book, and having found it, endeavoured to pray; but immediately experienced the impossibility of drawing nigh to God, unless he first draw nigh to us. I made many passionate attempts towards prayer, but failed in all.

"Having an obscure notion of the efficacy of faith, I resolved upon an experiment, to prove whether I had faith or not. For this purpose I resolved to repeat the Creed; when I came to the second period of it, all traces of the former were struck out of my memory, nor could I recollect one syllable of the matter. While I endeavoured to recover it, and when just upon the point, I perceived a sensation in my brain, like a tremulous vibration in all the fibres of it. By this means I lost the words in the very instant when I thought to have laid hold of them. This threw me into an agony; but growing a little calmer, I made an attempt for the third time; here again I failed in the same manner as before.

"I considered it as a supernatural interposition to inform me, that having sinned against the Holy Ghost, I had no longer any interest in Christ, or in the gifts of the Spirit. Being assured of this, with the most rooted conviction, I gave myself up to despair. I felt a sense of burning in my heart, like that of real fire, and concluded it was an earnest of those eternal flames which would soon receive me. I laid myself down,

howling with horror, while my knees smote against each other.

"In this condition my brother found me, and the first words I spoke to him were, 'Oh! Brother, I am damned! think of eternity, and then think what it is to be damned!' I had, indeed, a sense of eternity impressed upon my mind, which seemed almost to amount to a full comprehension of it. My brother, pierced to the heart with the sight of my misery, tried to comfort me; but all to no purpose. I refused comfort; and my mind appeared to me in such colours, that to administer it to me, was only to exasperate me, and to mock my fears.

"At length, I remembered my friend, Martin Madan, and sent for him. I used to think him an enthusiast, but now seemed convinced, that if there was any balm in Gilead, he must administer it to me. On former occasions, when my spiritual concerns had at any time occurred to me, I thought likewise on the necessity of repentance. I knew that many persons had spoken of shedding tears for sin; but when I asked myself, whether the time would ever come when I should weep for mine, it seemed to me that a stone might sooner do it.

"Not knowing that Christ was exalted to give repentance, I despaired of ever attaining to it. My friend came to me; we sat on the bed-side together, and he began to declare to me the gospel. He spoke of original sin, and the corruption of every man born into the world, whereby every one is a child of wrath. I perceived something like hope dawning in my heart.

This doctrine set me more upon a level with the rest of mankind, and made my condition appear less desperate.

"Next he insisted on the all-atoning efficacy of the blood of Jesus, and his righteousness, for our justification. While listening to this part of his discourse, and the scriptures upon which he founded it, my heart began to burn within me; my soul was pierced with a sense of my bitter ingratitude to so merciful a Saviour; and those tears, which I thought impossible, burst forth freely. I saw clearly that my case required such a remedy, and had not the least doubt within myself, but that this was the gospel of salvation.

"Lastly, he urged the necessity of a lively faith in Jesus Christ; not an assent only of the understanding, but a faith of application, an actually laying hold of it, and embracing it as a salvation purchased for *me* personally. Here I failed, and deplored my want of such a faith. He told me it was the gift of God, which he trusted he would bestow upon me. I could only reply, 'I wish he would:'—a very irreverent petition, but a very sincere one, and such as the blessed God, in his due time, was pleased to answer.

"My brother, finding I had received consolation from Mr. Madan, was very anxious that I should take the earliest opportunity of conversing with him again; and, for this purpose, pressed me to go to him immediately. I was for putting it off; but my brother seemed impatient of delay; and, at length, prevailed on me to set out. I mention this to the honour of his candour and humanity; which would suffer no dif-

ference of sentiments to interfere with them. My welfare was his only object, and all his prejudices fled before his zeal to procure it. May he receive, for his recompense, all that happiness the gospel, which I then first became acquainted with, is alone able to impart!

"Easier, indeed, I was; but far from easy. The wounded spirit within me was less in pain, but by no means healed. What I had experienced was but the beginning of sorrows, and a long train of still greater terrors was at hand. I slept my usual three hours well, and then awoke with ten times a stronger alienation from God than ever.

"Satan plied me close with horrible visions, and more horrible voices. My ears rang with the sound of torments, that seemed to await me. Then did the "pains of hell get hold on me," and, before daybreak, the very "sorrows of death encompassed me." A numbness seized upon the extremities of my body, and life seemed to retreat before it; my hands and feet became cold and stiff; a cold sweat stood upon my forehead; my heart seemed at every pulse to beat its last, and my soul to cling to my lips, as if on the very brink of departure. No convicted criminal ever feared death more, or was more assured of dying.

"At eleven o'clock my brother called upon me, and in about an hour after his arrival, that distemper of mind, which I had so ardently wished for, actually seized me.

"While I traversed the apartment, in the most horrible dismay of soul, expecting every moment, that the

earth would open her mouth and swallow me; my conscience scaring me, the avenger of blood pursuing me, and the city of refuge out of reach and out of sight; a strange and horrible darkness fell upon me. If it were possible that a heavy blow could light on the brain, without touching the skull, such was the sensation I felt. I clapped my hand to my forehead, and cried aloud, through the pain it gave me. At every stroke my thoughts and expressions became more wild and indistinct; all that remained clear was the sense of sin, and the expectation of punishment. These kept undisturbed possession all through my illness, without interruption or abatement.

"My brother instantly perceived the change, and consulted with my friends on the best manner to dispose of me. It was agreed among them, that I should be carried to St. Alban's, where Dr. Cotton kept a house for the reception of such patients, and with whom I was known to have a slight acquaintance. Not only his skill, as a physician, recommended him to their choice, but his well-known humanity and sweetness of temper. It will be proper to draw a veil over the secrets of my prison-house."

CHAP. VI.

COWPER'S RECOVERY. HIS REMOVAL TO HUNTINGDON. THE UNWIN FAMILY.

In the interval between his attempt at suicide and his removal to a private madhouse, Cowper composed the following sapphics, describing his own dreadful state of mind.

Hatred and vengeance,—my eternal portion
Scarce can endure delay of execution,—
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
Soul in a moment.

Damn'd below Judas; more abhorr'd than he was,
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master!
Twice-betray'd Jesus me, the last delinquent,
Deems the profanest.

Man disavows, and Deity disowns me.
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;
Therefore, Hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all
Bolted against me.

Hard lot! encompass'd with a thousand dangers;
Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors,
I'm call'd, if vanquish'd[1], to receive a sentence
Worse than Abiram's.

Him the vindictive rod of angry Justice
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong.
I, fed[1] with judgement, in a fleshly tomb, am
Buried above ground.

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[1] Both these passages are evidently corrupt. Possibly the first should be *in anguish*.

This was the character of his madness, .. the most dreadful in which madness presents itself. He threw away the Bible, as a book in which he had no longer any interest or portion. A vein of self-loathing and abhorrence ran through all his insanity. "The accuser of the brethren, he says, ever busy with him, night and day, brought to his recollection in dreams his long forgotten sins, and charged upon his conscience things of an indifferent nature as atrocious crimes." Five months he passed in continual expectation that the divine vengeance would instantly plunge him into the bottomless pit. But such horrors in madness are like those in dreams; the maniac and the dreamer seem to undergo what could not possibly be undergone by one awake or in his senses; and, indeed, he says, that after five months of this expectation, he became so familiar with despair as to entertain a sort of hardiness and indifference as to the event.

"I began to persuade myself, that while the execution of the sentence was suspended, it would be for my interest to indulge a less horrible train of ideas, than I had been accustomed to dwell upon. 'Eat, and drink, for to-morrow thou shalt be in hell,' was the maxim on which I proceeded. By this means, I entered into conversation with the Doctor, laughed at his stories, and told him some of my own to match them; still, however, carrying a sentence of irrevocable doom in my heart.

"He observed the seeming alteration with pleasure. Believing, as well he might, that my smiles were sincere, he thought my recovery well nigh completed; but they were, in reality, like the green sur-

face of a morass, pleasant to the eye, but a cover for nothing but rottenness and filth. The only thing that could promote and effectuate my cure, was yet wanting;—an experimental knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

" I remember, about this time, a diabolical species of regret that found harbour in my wretched heart. I was sincerely sorry that I had not seized every opportunity of giving scope to my wicked appetites; and even envied those, who being departed to their own place before me, had the consolation to reflect that they had well earned their miserable inheritance, by indulging their sensuality without restraint. Oh, merciful God! What a Tophet of pollution is the human soul; and wherein do we differ from the devils, unless thy grace prevent us!"

In about three months more his brother, who was a fellow of Benet College and resided there, came from Cambridge to visit him. Dr. Cotton had reported a great amendment, and was not mistaken in that opinion, though John Cowper was disappointed at finding him almost as silent and reserved as ever. His own sensations at the meeting he describes as painfully mingled with sorrow for his own remediless condition, and envy of his brother's happiness.

" As soon as we were left alone, he asked me how I found myself; I answered, ' As much better as despair can make me.' We went together into the garden. Here, on expressing a settled assurance of sudden judgement, he protested to me, that it was all a delusion; and protested so strongly, that I could not help giving some attention to him. I burst into tears,

and cried out, ‘ If it be a delusion, then am I the happiest of beings.’ Something like a ray of hope was shot into my heart; but still I was afraid to indulge it. We dined together, and I spent the afternoon in a more cheerful manner. Something seemed to whisper to me every moment, ‘ Still there is mercy.’

“ Even after he left me, this change of sentiment gathered ground continually; yet my mind was in such a fluctuating state, that I can only call it a vague presage of better things at hand, without being able to assign a reason for it. The servant observed a sudden alteration in me for the better; and the man, whom I have ever since retained in my service, expressed great joy on the occasion.

“ I went to bed and slept well. In the morning, I dreamed that the sweetest boy I ever saw came dancing up to my bedside; he seemed just out of leading-strings, yet I took particular notice of the firmness and steadiness of his tread. The sight affected me with pleasure, and served at least to harmonize my spirits; so that I awoke for the first time with a sensation of delight on my mind. Still, however, I knew not where to look for the establishment of the comfort I felt. My joy was as much a mystery to myself as to those about me. The blessed God was preparing me for the clearer light of his countenance by this first dawning of his light upon me.”

That he could feel the force of argument, and that he could weep, were sure symptoms of amendment. Indeed, he dated his recovery from his brother’s visit; saying, in a letter[2] written before the Memoir, “ though

[2] To Lady Hesketh, July 5, 1765.

he only staid one day with me, his company served to put to flight a thousand deliriums and delusions which I still laboured under, and the next morning I found myself a new creature." It was not long before, walking in the garden, he found, upon a seat there, a Bible, which very probably had been laid in his way. He opened it upon the chapter in which Lazarus is raised from the dead, and he saw "so much benevolence, and mercy, and goodness, and sympathy with miserable man, in our Saviour's conduct," that he was moved almost to tears; "little thinking," he says, "that it was an exact type of the mercy which Jesus was on the point of extending towards myself. I sighed, and said, 'Oh, that I had not rejected so good a Redeemer, —that I had not forfeited all his favours!' Thus was my heart softened, though not yet enlightened. I closed the book, without intending to open it again.

"Having risen with somewhat of a more cheerful feeling, I repaired to my room, where breakfast waited for me. While I sat at table, I found the cloud of horror, which had so long hung over me, was every moment passing away; and every moment came fraught with hope. I was continually more and more persuaded, that I was not utterly doomed to destruction. The way of salvation was still, however, hid from my eyes; nor did I see it at all clearer than before my illness. I only thought, that if it would please God to spare me, I would lead a better life; and that I would yet escape hell, if a religious observance of my duty would secure me from it. Thus may the terror of the Lord make a Pharisee; but only the sweet voice of mercy in the gospel, can make a Christian.

" But the happy period which was to shake off my fetters, and afford me a clear opening of the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus, was now arrived. I flung myself into a chair near the window, and seeing a Bible there, ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction. The first verse I saw, was the twenty-fifth of the third chapter of Romans: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.'

" Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fulness and completeness of his justification. In a moment I believed, and received the gospel. Whatever my friend Madan had said to me, so long before, revived in all its clearness, with 'demonstration of the Spirit and with power.' Unless the Almighty arm had been under me, I think I should have died with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears, and my voice choked with transport, I could only look up to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder. But the work of the Holy Spirit is best described in his own words, it was 'joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' Thus was my heavenly Father in Christ Jesus pleased to give me the full assurance of faith, and out of a stony, unbelieving heart, to raise up a child unto Abraham. How glad should I now have been to have spent every moment in prayer and thanksgiving!

" I lost no opportunity of repairing to a throne of

grace; but flew to it with an earnestness irresistible and never to be satisfied. Could I help it? Could I do otherwise than love and rejoice in my reconciled Father in Christ Jesus? The Lord had enlarged my heart, and I ran in the way of his commandments. For many succeeding weeks, tears were ready to flow, if I did but speak of the gospel, or mention the name of Jesus. To rejoice day and night was all my employment. Too happy to sleep much, I thought it was lost time that was spent in slumber. Oh that the ardour of my first love had continued! But I have known many a lifeless and unhallowed hour since; long intervals of darkness, interrupted by short returns of peace and joy in believing.

"My physician, ever watchful and apprehensive for my welfare, was now alarmed, lest the sudden transition from despair to joy, should terminate in a fatal frenzy. But 'the Lord was my strength and my song, and was become my salvation.' I said, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord; he has chastened me sore, but not given me over unto death. O give thanks unto the Lord, for his mercy endureth for ever! In a short time, Dr. C. became satisfied, and acquiesced in the soundness of my cure; and much sweet communion I had with him, concerning the things of our salvation."

Cowper thought that the low state of body and mind to which his disease and the remedies employed in subduing it had reduced him, were well-calculated to humble his natural vain glory and pride of heart. "Blessed," says he, "be the God of salvation for

every sigh I drew, for every tear I shed; since thus it pleased him to judge me here, that I might not be judged hereafter." He was in no haste to remove after his recovery; but remained twelve months longer with Dr. Cotton. This was equally a matter of prudence and of convenience, till he had determined what course to pursue upon leaving his present abode; meantime, in case of any tendency to relapse, the best medical and moral means might immediately be applied; and he took great delight in Dr. Cotton's religious conversation. He thought him a true philosopher, "every tittle of his knowledge on natural subjects being connected in his mind with the firm belief of an Omnipotent Agent."

Dr. Cotton was moreover a man of letters. His "Visions in Verse" used to be one of those books which were always in print, because there was a certain demand for them as presents for young people. His various pieces in prose and verse were collected and published in two volumes after his death; and from this edition his poems[3] were incorporated in Dr. Anderson's "Collection of the British Poets." The well-known stanzas entitled "The Fireside" still hold and are likely to retain a place in popular selections. He was an amiable, mild, good man, verging at that time to old age, who many years before had lost a dearly beloved wife, and on that occasion felt what happily for himself he had long believed, "that no

[3] "Death and the Rake," which Dr. Cotton gives as "A Dutch Tale," is the same story which has been better told by Mrs. Piozzi as "The Three Warnings."

system but that of Christianity is able to sustain the soul amidst all the distresses and difficulties of life. The consolations of philosophy only are specious trifles at best; all cold and impotent applications to the bleeding heart. But the religion of Jesus, like its gracious Author, is an inexhaustible source of comfort in this world, and gives us the hope of everlasting enjoyment in the next." Thus he expressed[4] himself in reply to a letter of consolation from Doddridge upon his loss.

" I reckon it," says Cowper, " one instance of the Providence which has attended me throughout this whole event, that instead of being delivered into the hands of one of the London physicians, who were so much nearer that I wonder I was not, I was carried to Doctor Cotton. I was not only treated by him with the greatest tenderness while I was ill, and attended with the utmost diligence, but when my reason was restored to me, and I had so much need of a religious friend to converse with, to whom I could open my mind on the subject without reserve, I could hardly have found a fitter person for the purpose. My eagerness and anxiety to settle my opinions upon that long

[4] April 29, 1749. In this letter, he says, " What the mind feels upon such a painful divorce none can adequately know but they who have had the bitter experience of the sad solemnity. However, delicate and worthy minds will readily paint to themselves something unutterably soft and moving upon the separation of two hearts, whose only division was their lodgement in two breasts." *Doddridge's Correspondence and Diary*, vol. v. p. 117. He is called *Henry* Cotton in this work, but his name was Nathaniel.

neglected point, made it necessary that, while my mind was yet weak and my spirits uncertain, I should have some assistance. The Doctor was as ready to administer relief to me in this article likewise, and as well qualified to do it, as in that which was more immediately his province. How many physicians would have thought this an irregular appetite, and a symptom of remaining madness! But if it were so, my friend was as mad as myself; and it was well for me that he was so[5]."

During this part of his abode at St. Albans, he again poured out his feelings in verse; and the contrast is indeed striking between what he called this specimen of his first Christian thoughts, and that song of despair which cannot be perused without shuddering. He cast his thoughts in the form of a hymn, which he entitled "The Happy Change," and took for his text part of a verse in the Revelation—"Behold I make all things new."

How blest thy creature is, O God,
When with a single eye
He views the lustre of thy word,
The day-spring from on high!

Through all the storms that veil the skies,
And frown on earthly things,
The Sun of Righteousness he eyes,
With healing on his wings.

Struck by that light, the human heart,
A barren soil no more,
Sends the sweet smell of grace abroad,
Where serpents lurk'd before.

[5] To Lady Hesketh, July 4, 1765.

The soul, a dreary province once
Of Satan's dark domain,
Feels a new empire form'd within,
And owns a heavenly reign.

The glorious orb, whose golden beams
The fruitful year control,
Since first, obedient to thy word,
He started from the goal,

Has cheer'd the nations with the joys
His orient rays impart;
But, Jesus, 'tis thy light alone
Can shine upon the heart.

He had now to fix upon a place of residence. To remain longer with Dr. Cotton, to whom he was by this time "very deep in debt," was what he could not afford. He employed his brother, therefore, to look for lodgings in the neighbourhood of Cambridge, "being," said he, "determined, by the Lord's leave, to see London, the scene of my former abominations, no longer." And that he might have no obligation to return thither, he resigned the office of commissioner of bankrupts, which he had for some years held, with about sixty pounds per annum. He now felt so strongly his ignorance of the law, that he could not in conscience take the accustomed oath; and by this resignation he reduced himself to an income scarcely sufficient for his maintenance; "but I would rather," says he, "have starved in reality, than deliberately have offended against my Saviour." His relations made no attempt to dissuade him from this resolution. Instead of being to them an object of high hopes and expectations, as

from his talents and acquirements and disposition he had been when he began life, he had become one of painful and all but hopeless anxiety. Probably they doubted whether his cure was complete, and inferred, from his intended conduct, that though the malady had assumed a happier form, his mind was still unsound. They therefore subscribed[6] among themselves an annual allowance, such as made his own diminished means just sufficient to maintain him respectably, but frugally, in retirement, and left him to follow his own course.

His resolution to withdraw from the business of the world, and from its society, occasioned another of those poems which, because of the circumstances that gave rise to them, belong properly to the personal history of an author.

Far from the world, O Lord, I flee,
From strife and tumult far;
From scenes where Satan wages still
His most successful war.

The calm retreat, the silent shade,
With prayer and praise agree;
And seem, by thy sweet bounty, made
For those who follow thee.

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[6] This fact, which has not, I believe, been noticed in any life of Cowper, might be inferred from his own memoir, where, after saying he would rather have starved than deliberately have offended against his Saviour, he adds, "His great mercy has raised me up such friends as have enabled me to enjoy all the comforts and conveniences of life. I am well assured that, while I live, 'bread shall be given me, and water shall be sure.'" But proof of the fact will presently be given.

There, if thy Spirit touch the soul,
And grace her mean abode,
Oh, with what peace, and joy, and love,
She communes with her God!

There like the nightingale she pours
Her solitary lays;
Nor asks a witness of her song,
Nor thirsts for human praise.

Author and guardian of my life,
Sweet source of light divine,
And, (all harmonious names in one,)
My Saviour, thou art mine!

What thanks I owe thee, and what love,
A boundless, endless store,
Shall echo through the realms above
When time shall be no more.

After many unsuccessful attempts to procure lodgings nearer Cambridge, John Cowper wrote to say he had found some at Huntingdon which he believed might suit him. Though this was an inconvenient distance from Cambridge, and Cowper had fixed upon that part of the country solely for the sake of being near his brother, he did not hesitate to take them, having then, he said, been twelve months in perfect health, and his circumstances requiring a less expensive way of life. Before this arrangement was made, he says, "I one day poured out my soul to God in prayer, beseeching him that wherever it should please him in his fatherly mercy to lead me, it might be into the society of those who feared his name, and loved the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth." It was with great reluctance that he thought of leaving what he

called the place of his second nativity, where he had "so much leisure to study the blessed word of God, and had enjoyed so much happiness.

"On the 7th of June, 1765," he proceeds, "having spent more than eighteen months at St. Alban's, partly in bondage, and partly in the liberty wherewith Christ had made me free, I took my leave of the place at four in the morning, and set out for Cambridge. The servant, whom I lately mentioned as rejoicing in my recovery, attended me. He had maintained such an affectionate watchfulness over me during my whole illness, and waited on me with so much patience and gentleness, that I could not bear to leave him behind, though it was with some difficulty the doctor was prevailed on to part with him. The strongest argument of all was the earnest desire he expressed to follow me. He seemed to have been providentially thrown in my way, having entered Dr. Cotton's service just time enough to attend me; and I have strong ground to hope, that God will use me as an instrument to bring him to a knowledge of Jesus. It is impossible to say, with how delightful a sense of his protection, and fatherly care of me, it has pleased the Almighty to favour me, during the whole journey.

"I remembered the pollution which is in the world, and the sad share I had in it myself; and my heart ached at the thought of entering it again. The blessed God had endued me with some concern for his glory, and I was fearful of hearing it traduced by oaths and blasphemies, the common language of this highly favoured, but ungrateful country. But 'fear not, I

am with thee,' was my comfort. I passed the whole journey in silent communion with God; and those hours are amongst the happiest I have known."

Four days he remained at Cambridge, and then, on Saturday the twenty-second, his brother accompanied him to Huntingdon, and having introduced him to his lodgings, left him there, without any other introduction. "No sooner," says Cowper, "had he left me than finding myself surrounded by strangers, and in a strange place, my spirits began to sink, and I felt (such was the backsliding state of my heart) like a traveller in the midst of an inhospitable desert, without a friend to comfort, or a guide to direct him. I walked forth, towards the close of the day, in this melancholy frame of mind, and having wandered about a mile from the town, I found my heart, at length, so powerfully drawn towards the Lord, that having gained a retired and secret nook in the corner of a field, I kneeled down under a bank and poured forth my complaints before him. It pleased my Saviour to hear me, so that this oppression was taken off, and I was enabled to trust in him that careth for the stranger, to roll my burden upon him, and to rest assured, that whereso-ever he might cast my lot, the God of all consolation would still be with me. But this was not all. He did for me more than either I had asked or thought.

"The next day I went to church for the first time after my recovery. Throughout the whole service, I had much to do to restrain my emotions, so fully did I see the beauty and the glory of the Lord. My heart was full of love to all the congregation, especially to those in whom I observed an air of sober attention.

A grave and sober person sat in the pew with me; him I have since seen and often conversed with, and have found him a pious man, and a true servant of the blessed Redeemer. While he was singing the psalm, I looked at him, and observing him intent on his holy employment, I could not help saying in my heart, with much emotion, 'Bless you, for praising Him whom my soul loveth.'

"Such was the goodness of the Lord to me, that he gave me 'the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;' and though my voice was silent, being stopped by the intenseness of what I felt, yet my soul sung within me, and even leaped for joy. And when the gospel for the day was read, the sound of it was more than I could well support. Oh, what a word is the word of God, when the Spirit quickens us to receive it, and gives the hearing ear, and the understanding heart! The harmony of heaven is in it, and discovers its author. The parable of the prodigal son was the portion. I saw myself in that glass so clearly, and the loving kindness of my slighted and forgotten Lord, that the whole scene was realized to me, and acted over in my heart.

"I went immediately after church to the place where I had prayed the day before, and found the relief I had there received was but the earnest of a richer blessing. How shall I express what the Lord did for me, except by saying, that he made all his goodness to pass before me. I seemed to speak to him face to face, as a man conversing with his friend, except that my speech was only in tears of joy, and groanings which cannot be uttered. I could say, indeed, with

Jacob, not 'how dreadful,' but how lovely, 'is this place! This is none other than the house of God.'"

His mind had now recovered its elasticity, and when not engaged in devotional feelings, its natural sportiveness. On the Monday he resumed with his friend Hill an intercourse which from their boyhood till his death was never interrupted, while he was capable of correspondence. Mr. Hill had attended with friendly care to his affairs during his illness, and "the only recompense I can make," says Cowper, "is to tell you that by the mercy of God I am restored to perfect health, both of mind and body. This I believe will give you pleasure, and I would gladly do any thing from which you could receive it.

"I have a lodging that puts me continually in mind of our summer excursions; we have had many worse, and except the size of it (which, however, is sufficient for a single man), but few better. I am not quite alone, having brought a servant with me from St. Alban's, who is the very mirror of fidelity and affection for his master. And whereas the Turkish Spy says, he kept no servant, because he would not have an enemy in his house, I hired mine, because I would have a friend. Men do not usually bestow these encomiums on their lackeys, nor do they usually deserve them; but I have had experience of mine, both in sickness and in health, and never saw his fellow.

"The river Ouse, I forget how they spell it, is the most agreeable circumstance in this part of the world; at this town, it is I believe as wide as the Thames at Windsor; nor does the silver Thames better deserve that epithet, nor has it more flowers upon its banks,

these being attributes, which, in strict truth, belong to neither. Fluellin would say, they are as like as my fingers to my fingers, and there is salmon in both. It is a noble stream to bathe in, and I shall make that use of it three times a week, having introduced myself to it for the first time this morning."

Lady Hesketh was the last of his female relations whom he had seen before he was removed from London to St. Alban's. She was the first to whom he wrote after his recovery. "Since the visit you were so kind to pay me in the Temple," said he[7], "(the only time I ever saw you without pleasure), what have I not suffered! And since it has pleased God to restore me to the use of my reason, what have I not enjoyed! You know by experience how pleasant it is to feel the first approaches of health after a fever;—but oh, the fever of the brain! To feel the quenching of that fire is indeed a blessing which I think it impossible to receive without the most consummate gratitude. Terrible as this chastisement is, I acknowledge in it the hand of an infinite justice; nor is it at all more difficult for me to perceive in it the hand of an infinite mercy likewise. When I consider the effect it has had upon me, I am exceedingly thankful for it, and, without hypocrisy, esteem it the greatest blessing, next to life itself, I have received from the divine bounty. I pray God that I may ever retain this sense of it; and then I am sure I shall continue to be, as I am at present, really happy.

"I write thus to you, that you may not think me a forlorn and wretched creature; which you might be

[7] July 6, 1765.

apt to do, considering my very distant removal from every friend I have in the world; a circumstance which, before this event befell me, would undoubtedly have made me so; but my affliction has taught me a road to happiness, which without it I should never have found. You may now inform all those whom you think really interested in my welfare, that they have no need to be apprehensive on the score of my happiness at present. And you yourself will believe that my happiness is no dream, because I have told you the foundation on which it is built."

To this letter Cowper received an immediate reply, .. " a friendly and comfortable" reply, he calls it, for which as immediately he thanked his dear cousin. Again he alluded to their last interview. " What," said he, " could you think of my unaccountable behaviour to you on that visit? I remember I neither spoke to you, nor looked at you. The solution of the mystery, indeed, followed soon after; but at the time it must have been inexplicable. The uproar within was even then begun, and my silence was only the sulkiness of a thunder-storm before it opens. I am glad, however, that the only instance in which I knew not how to value your company, was when I was not in my senses. It was the first of the kind, and I trust in God it will be the last[8]." Twenty years later, when after a long cessation his intercourse with this beloved kinswoman was renewed, Cowper again reminded her of that painful interview, which had left upon his mind an indelible impression: " You do not forget, I dare say, that you and Sir Thomas called upon me in my

[8] July 4.

chambers, a very few days before I took leave of London. Then it was that I saw you last; and then it was that I said in my heart, upon your going out at the door, Farewell! there will be no more intercourse between us,—for ever[9]!"

He had not written to her from St. Alban's when assured of his recovery, because he was willing to perform quarantine first, both for his own sake, and because he thought his letters would be more satisfactory to her from any other quarter. All was sunshine with him now. He liked the place extremely, as far as he was acquainted with it. For one who had so long lived in chambers it was no discomfort to be alone in lodgings. It was in the height of summer, he was fond of bathing, and there was the Ouse at hand. "Here is a card assembly," he writes to Mr. Hill[10], "and a dancing assembly, and a horse race, and a club, and a bowling-green, so that I am well off, you perceive, in point of diversions; especially as I shall go to 'em just as much as I should if I lived a thousand miles off. But no matter for that; the spectator at a play is more entertained than the actor, and in real life it is much the same. You will say, perhaps, that if I never frequent these places I shall not come within the description of a spectator; and you will say right. I have made a blunder, which shall be corrected in the next edition."

The first visit he received was from his woollen-draper, "a very healthy, wealthy, sensible, sponsible man, and extremely civil," who offered him the use of a cold bath, and promised to get him the St. James's

[9] Nov. 23, 1785. [10] July 3.

Chronicle, and to do him every service in his power. Soon afterwards Mr. Hodgson, the clergyman of the parish, called upon him, "a good preacher, a conscientious minister, and a very sensible man." Cowper neither sought society, nor shunned it at this time; he was in that happy state of mind which can enjoy fit company, and yet feel no want of it in solitude. In his daily walk, his weekly meeting with his brother, and his correspondence with Hill, the most intimate and faithful of his friends, and with Lady Hesketh, who after his attachment to her sister had been violently broken, had become to him the dearest of his relations, he found sufficient occupation and amusement.

"As Mr. Quin," he said, "very roundly expressed himself upon some such occasion, 'here is very plentiful accommodation, and great happiness of provision; so that if I starve, it must be through forgetfulness, rather than scarcity[11].'" But never having been accustomed to take thought for himself about these things, he felt the discomfort of his way of life, before he discovered its improvidence. "Whatever you may think of the matter," said he to his friend Hill, "it is no such easy thing to keep house for two people. A man cannot always live like the lions in the Tower; and a joint of meat in so small a family is an endless incumbrance. In short I never knew how to pity poor housekeepers before; but now I cease to wonder at that politic cast which their occupation usually gives to their countenance, for it is really a matter full of perplexity[12]."

The state of his finances at this time, though it was

[11] To Lady Hesketh, July 5.

[12] To Mr. Hill, July 3.

far from easy, seems to have caused him little anxiety. "You know, Joe," he says, "I am very deep in debt to my little physician at St. Alban's, and that the handsomest thing I can do will be to pay him *le plutôt qu'il sera possible*, (this is vile French, I believe, but you can, now, correct it.) My brother informs me that you have such a quantity of cash in your hands, on my account, that I may venture to send him forty pounds immediately. This, therefore, I shall be obliged if you will manage for me; and when you receive the hundred pounds, which my brother likewise brags you are shortly to receive, I shall be glad if you will discharge the remainder of that debt, without waiting for any further advice from your humble servant[13]."

The rent of his chambers in the Temple constituted part of the resources upon which he reckoned; but the person who had entered upon them was one who found it convenient to postpone payment till it should be forced from him, and Cowper was compelled to call in the professional assistance of his friend Hill[14]. "You are an old dog," he says, "at a bad tenant; witness all my uncle's and your mother's geese and gridirons. There is something so extremely impertinent in entering upon a man's premises, and using them without paying for 'em, that I could easily resent it if I would. But I rather choose to entertain myself with thinking how you will scour the man about, and worry him to death, if once you begin with him. Poor toad! I leave him entirely to your mercy!" The toad, however, was not under the harrow four months afterwards, when Cowper says of him, "I think the Welshman must

[13] To Mr. Hill, Aug. 14. [14] July 3.

morris;—what think you? If he withdraws to his native mountains we shall never catch him; so the best way is to let him run in debt no longer[15]." After another month's interval, he says, "I rejoice with you in the victory you have obtained over the Welshman's pocket. The reluctance with which he pays and promises to pay, gives me but little concern, further than as it seems to threaten you with the trouble of many fruitless applications hereafter, in the receipt of my lordship's rents[16]."

"The storm of sixty-three," Cowper said, "made a wreck of the friendships he had contracted in the course of many years[17], Hill's excepted, which had survived the tempest. In an earlier letter, he says, "I have great reason to be thankful; I have lost none of my acquaintances, but those whom I determined not to keep. I am sorry the class is so numerous[18]." In another a somewhat different cause is assigned; "My friends must excuse me, if I write to none but those who lay it fairly in my way to do so. The inference I am apt to draw from their silence is, that they wish *me* to be silent too." His own peculiar circle had been broken up soon after he was withdrawn from it. The first account which he heard of it was of a kind to startle him. "The tragedies of Lloyd and Bensley," said he to Hill, "are both very deep. If they are not of use to the surviving part of the society, it will be their own fault[19]." To Lady Hesketh he unbosomed his feelings upon this subject. "Two of my friends have been cut off during my illness, in

[15] Nov. 8. [16] Dec. 3. [17] Sept. 25, 1770.
[18] Aug. 1, 1763. [19] July 3, 1763.

the midst of such a life as it is frightful to reflect upon; and here am I, in better health and spirits than I can almost remember to have enjoyed before, after having spent months in the apprehension of instant death. How mysterious are the ways of Providence! Why did I receive grace and mercy? Why was I preserved, afflicted for my good, received, as I trust, into favour, and blessed with the greatest happiness I can ever know, or hope for, in this life, while these were overtaken by the great arrest, unawakened, unrepenting, and every way unprepared for it? His infinite wisdom, to whose infinite mercy I owe it all, can solve these questions, and none beside him."

Thornton's name, I believe, never occurs in his letters. "My friend Colman," he says, "has had good fortune. I wish him better fortune still, which is, that he may make a right use of it[20]." Towards Colman, indeed, he had always a friendly feeling, and for Thurlow also; and when for a while he thought and spoke of them both with bitterness, it was more from a sense of disappointed friendship than of wounded pride. Cowper's was, indeed, a heart in which latent affections held their place, and were easily called into action. Eight-and-twenty years after the great crisis of his life, he says, "I often think of Carr, and shall always think of him with affection. Should I never see him more, I shall never, I trust, be capable of forgetting his indefatigable attention to me during the last year that I spent in London. Two years after, I invited him to Huntingdon, where I lived at that time, but he pleaded some engagement, and I have neither

[20] July 3, 1765.

seen nor heard of him, except from yourself, from that hour to the present. I know, by experience, with what reluctance we move when we have been long fixed; but could he prevail on himself to move hither, he would make me very happy, and when you write to him next, you may tell him so[21]."

He was in hopes also of receiving a visit at Huntingdon from Hill, to whom he says, "Both Lady Hesketh and my brother had apprized me of your intention to give me a call; and herein I find they were both mistaken. But they both informed me, likewise, that you were already set out for Warwickshire; in consequence of which latter intelligence, I have lived in continual expectation of seeing you, any time this fortnight. Now, how these two ingenious personages (for such they are both) should mistake an expedition to French Flanders for a journey to Warwickshire, is more than I, with all my ingenuity, can imagine. I am glad, however, that I have still a chance of seeing you, and shall treasure it up amongst my agreeable expectations. In the mean time, you are welcome to the British shore, as the song has it, and I thank you for your epitome of your travels. You don't tell me how you escaped the vigilance of the custom-house officers, though I dare say you were knuckle-deep in contrabands, and had your boots stuffed with all and all manner of unlawful wares and merchandises." This visit however soon took place, and Hill was the only one of his old friends whom Cowper saw for many years after his retirement.

For some three months Huntingdon continued to

[21] To Mr. Rowley, Oct. 22, 1791.

please him more and more. "The longer I live here," said he, "the better I like the place, and the people who belong to it." It must have been for the sake of the people that he liked the place; though in that respect indeed Cowper was easily satisfied; his feeling of local attachment could strike root in any soil. The old historian and archdeacon of this town, Henry, who derived his name from it, praised Huntingdon for the conveniency of the fens just by, and its great advantages for hunting and fishing; "it surpassed," he said, "all the neighbouring towns in the pleasantness of its situation, and in its handsomeness and beauty." But since his time, thirteen out of fifteen churches had been demolished, or had fallen to ruins; a priory of regular canons, a house of Augustinian friars, and two hospitals for lepers and poor people, had been destroyed; and of its large castle, placed on a commanding site above the Ouse, and supposed to have been originally a Roman work, no vestiges remained above ground. "From the Castle hill," says Camden, "there is a wide prospect, where one may see an extensive meadow, encompassed with the Ouse, called Portsholm, the sun never saw a more glorious one." The race ground was in this meadow. The vicinity of the fens was once thought an advantage; the plenty of pasture, the great profit of fishing, and the inexhaustible supply of turf for fuel being supposed to make amends for an atmosphere which was frequently laden with noisome fogs, and was never, at the best, salubrious.

The fish and the fowl of the fens were unmolested by Cowper. He was no angler, though, for a protestant,

one of the most icthyophagous of men; and he was no sportsman; his gentle heart, at no time of his life, needed Wordsworth's admonition,

> Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.

The country had little to tempt him abroad. "We have neither woods," he says, "nor commons, nor pleasant prospects; all flat and insipid; in the summer adorned only with blue willows, and in the winter covered with a flood[22]." Camden says that the Ouse decks the country with flowers; but Cowper, though fond of gardening, and though he used every year to purchase myrtles in Covent Garden for his chambers in the Temple, was no botanist. The Ouse was to him, as has been seen, the most agreeable circumstance in those parts; and the only spot in the neighbourhood which he describes as beautiful was a village called Hertford, about a mile and half from the town. "The church there," says he, "is very prettily situated upon a rising ground, so close to the river, that it washes the wall of the churchyard. I found an epitaph there the other morning, the two first lines of which, being better than any thing else I saw there, I made shift to remember. It is by a widow on her husband.

> "Thou wast too good to live on earth with me,
> And I not good enough to die with thee[23]."

The town, however, suited him. In his days it consisted of one street, nearly a mile in length, with

[22] To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 30, 1767.
[23] To Lady Hesketh, July 5, 1765.

several lanes branching off at right angles; it contained something more than three hundred houses, and less than two thousand inhabitants. It was one of the neatest towns in England, he said; and as it is a considerable thoroughfare, and small vessels come up the river from Lynn, there was stir enough to make it lively. Brewing was then the chief business, though not so extensively carried on as in the time of Cromwell's mother, who, from the profits of her brewery there, brought up her family in a manner not unbeseeming their gentle birth, and portioned her daughters well. Long after her house had been so greatly altered, within and without, that it was said to be new built, the chamber in which Oliver was born was preserved in its original state. The site has since been occupied by "a respectable brick mansion," called Cromwell House Academy, and now only the situation of that chamber is pointed out.

"You may recollect," says Cowper[24], to his benefactor and kinsman, the major, "that I had but very uncomfortable expectations of the accommodations I should meet with at Huntingdon. How much better is it, to take our lot where it shall please Providence to cast it, without anxiety! Had I chosen for myself, it is impossible I could have fixed upon a place so agreeable to me in all respects. I so much dreaded the thought of having a new acquaintance to make, with no other recommendation than that of being a perfect stranger, that I heartily wished no creature here might take the least notice of me. Instead of which, in about two months after my arrival, I became

[24] Oct. 18, 1765.

known to all the visitable people here, and do verily think it the most agreeable neighbourhood I ever saw.

"Here are three families, who have received me with the utmost civility; and two, in particular, have treated me with as much cordiality, as if their pedigree and mine had grown upon the same sheep-skin. Besides these, there are three or four single men, who suit my temper to a hair."

These were probably the "odd scrambling fellows like himself," whom he thus describes to Lady Hesketh[25]. "Another acquaintance, I have lately made, is with a Mr. Nicholson, a North-country divine, very poor, but very good and very happy. He reads prayers here twice a day, all the year round; and travels on foot, to serve two churches, every Sunday through the year; his journey out and home again being sixteen miles. I supped with him last night. He gave me bread and cheese, and a black jug of ale of his own brewing, and doubtless brewed by his own hands. Another of my acquaintance is Mr. ——, a thin, tall, old man, and as good as he is thin. He drinks nothing but water, and eats no flesh; partly (I believe) from a religious scruple, (for he is very religious,) and partly in the spirit of a valetudinarian. He is to be met with every morning of his life, at about six o'clock, at a fountain of very fine water, about a mile from the town, which is reckoned extremely like the Bristol spring. Being both early risers, and the only early walkers in the place, we soon became acquainted. His great piety can be equalled by nothing but his great

[25] Sept. 14, 1765.

regularity, for he is the most perfect time-piece in the world. I have received a visit likewise from Mr. ——. He is very much a gentleman, well-read, and sensible. I am persuaded, in short, that if I had the choice of all England, where to fix my abode, I could not have chosen better for myself, and most likely I should not have chosen so well."

"As to my own personal condition," he says, "I am much happier than the day is long, and sunshine and candle-light alike see me perfectly contented. I get books in abundance, a deal of *comfortable leisure*, and enjoy better health, I think, than for many years past. What is there wanting to make me happy? Nothing, if I can but be as thankful as I ought; and I trust that He who has bestowed so many blessings upon me, will give me gratitude to crown them all[26]."

Cowper had not at this time so fixed himself in retirement as to give up all thought of visiting his friends. He says to Lady Hesketh[27], "You cannot think how glad I am to hear you are going to commence lady and mistress of Freemantle. I know it well, and could go to it from Southampton blindfold. You are kind to invite me to it, and I shall be so kind to myself as to accept the invitation; though I should not for a slight consideration be prevailed upon to quit my beloved retirement at Huntingdon." Some change in Lady Hesketh's plans frustrated this intention, which might otherwise have been frustrated by a change in his own. By the time he had spent three months in his lodgings, he had "contrived, by the help of good management and a clear notion of economical

[26] To Major Cowper, Oct. 18, 1761. [27] Sept. 4. 1769.

affairs, to spend the income of a twelvemonth." One day he found himself "in a state of desertion." In his own words, "the communion I had been so long enabled to maintain with the Lord, was suddenly interrupted. I began to dislike my solitary situation, and to fear I should never be able to weather out the winter in so lonely a dwelling[28]." The excitement consequent upon such a recovery as his, was beginning to fail in solitude; and he felt the want of intellectual occupation and of domestic society, both which were essential for his happiness.

Fortunately he had then made acquaintance "with the race of the Unwins, consisting," as he says to Lady Hesketh[29], "of father and mother, and son and daughter, the most comfortable social folks you ever knew. The son is about twenty-one years of age; one of the most unreserved and amiable young men I ever conversed with. He is not yet arrived at that time of life when suspicion recommends itself to us in the form of wisdom, and sets every thing but our own dear selves at an immeasurable distance from our esteem and confidence. Consequently he is known almost as soon as seen; and having nothing in his heart that makes it necessary for him to keep it barred and bolted, opens it to the general view of a stranger. The father is a clergyman, and the son is designed for orders. The design, however, is quite his own, proceeding merely from his being, and having always been, sincere in his belief and love of the gospel."

The son, William Cawthorne Unwin, had been pleased with Cowper's countenance, whose appearance

[28] To Lady Hesketh, Nov. 9, 1785. [29] Sept. 14, 1763.

and deportment indeed were likely to form a frequent topic of discourse at the tea-tables in Huntingdon. The young man had a strong inclination to call on him; the father dissuaded him from this, because it was said that the stranger rather declined society than sought it. One day, however, as they came out of church after the morning prayers, Unwin, seeing him take a solitary walk under a row of trees, accosted and joined him there, and finding that his advances were received to his wish, engaged himself to drink tea with him that afternoon. "To my inexpressible joy," says Cowper, in his Memoir, "I found him one whose notions of religion were spiritual and lively; one whom the Lord had been training from his infancy to the service of the Temple. We opened our hearts to each other at the first interview; and when we parted I immediately retired to my chamber, and prayed the Lord, who had been the author, to be the guardian, of our friendship; to give it fervency and perpetuity even unto death; and I doubt not that my gracious Father has heard this prayer also."

Morley Unwin, the father of the young man, was at this time far advanced in years. He had been master of the free school, and lecturer to the two churches in Huntingdon, before he obtained a college living; and while in expectation of one, formed an engagement with a lady much younger than himself, Mary Cawthorne by name, the daughter of a draper in Ely; she was a person of lively talents with a sweet serene countenance; and she was remarkably fond of reading. Upon succeeding to the living of Grimstone, in Norfolk, he married and took up his abode

there; but Mrs. Unwin liked neither the situation nor the society of that sequestered place; and she prevailed on him to return to Huntingdon, where he was known and respected. Accordingly he took a large convenient house in the High Street there, and prepared a few pupils for the University. His only children were a son and daughter. Hayley remembered having noticed them at Cambridge in the year 1763, as a youth and damsel of countenances uncommonly pleasing.

On the Sunday, after the first interview with the son, Cowper dined with the family, and had much discourse with Mrs. Unwin. He says, in his Memoir, "I am not at liberty to describe the pleasure I had in conversing with her, because she will be one of the first who will have the perusal of this narrative; let it suffice to say, we had one faith, and had been baptized with the same baptism. When I returned to my lodging, I gave thanks to God, who had so graciously answered my prayers, by bringing me into the society of Christians."

The family into which Cowper was soon to be adopted, he thus described to Lady Hesketh[30]: "they are indeed a nice set of folks, and suit me exactly. I should have been more particular in my account of Miss Unwin, if I had had materials for a minute description. She is about eighteen years of age, rather handsome and genteel. In her mother's company she says little; not because her mother requires it of her, but because she seems glad of that excuse for not talking, being somewhat inclined to bashfulness. There is the most remarkable cordiality be-

[30] Oct. 18, 1765.

tween all the parts of the family; and the mother and daughter seem to dote upon each other. The first time I went to the house, I was introduced to the daughter alone; and sat with her near half an hour before her brother came in, who had appointed me to call upon him. Talking is necessary in a *tête-à-tête*, to distinguish the persons of the drama from the chairs they sit on: accordingly she talked a great deal, and exceedingly well; and, like the rest of the family, behaved with as much ease and address as if we had been old acquaintance. She resembles her mother in her great piety, who is one of the most remarkable instances of it I have ever seen. They are altogether the cheerfulest and most engaging family-piece it is possible to conceive.—Since I wrote the above, I met Mrs. Unwin in the street, and went home with her. She and I walked together, near two hours, in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company. I am treated in the family as if I was a near relation, and have been repeatedly invited to call upon them at all times. You know what a shy fellow I am; I cannot prevail with myself to make so much use of this privilege as I am sure they intend I should; but perhaps this awkwardness will wear off hereafter. It was my earnest request, before I left St. Alban's, that wherever it might please Providence to dispose of me, I might meet with such an acquaintance as I find in Mrs. Unwin. How happy it is to believe with a steadfast assurance, that our petitions

are heard, even while we are making them;—and how delightful to meet with a proof of it, in the effectual and actual grant of them! Surely it is a gracious finishing given to those means which the Almighty has been pleased to make use of for my conversion. After having been deservedly rendered unfit for any society, to be again qualified for it, and admitted at once into the fellowship of those whom God regards as the excellent of the earth, and whom, in the emphatical language of scripture, he preserves as the apple of his eye, is a blessing, which carries with it the stamp and visible superscription of divine bounty; —a grace unlimited as undeserved; and, like its glorious Author, free in its course and blessed in its operation."

The different tone in which he describes these new friends to Hill is remarkable, though the same regard and liking for them are expressed[31]. "I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with, when you were here. Their name is Unwin—the most agreeable people imaginable; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious civility of country gentlefolks as any I ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much, to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the

[31] Oct. 25, 1765.

daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which suits me exactly; go when I will I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse, instead of it, as we are all better for. You remember Rousseau's description of an English morning; such are the mornings I spend with these good people; and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug, and quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable, that had not an Unwin belonging to it.

"This incident convinces me of the truth of an observation I have often made, that when we circumscribe our estimate of all that is clever within the limits of our own acquaintance (which I at least have always been apt to do) we are guilty of very uncharitable censure upon the rest of the world, and of a narrowness of thinking disgraceful to ourselves. Wapping and Redriff may contain some of the most amiable persons living, and such as one would go to Wapping and Redriff to make acquaintance with."

When Cowper was "revolving in his mind the nature of his situation, and beginning for the first time to find an irksomeness in such retirement," a thought suddenly struck him; he should not fear, he says, to call it a suggestion of the good providence of God which had brought him to Huntingdon. "Suddenly it occurred to me, that I might probably find a place in Mr. Unwin's family as a boarder. A young gentleman, who had lived with him as a pupil, was the

day before gone to Cambridge. It appeared to me, at least, possible, that I might be allowed to succeed him. From the moment this thought struck me, such a tumult of anxious solicitude seized me, that for two or three days I could not divert my mind to any other subject. I blamed and condemned myself for want of submission to the Lord's will; but still the language of my mutinous and disobedient heart was, 'Give me the blessing, or else I die!'

"About the third evening after I had determined upon this measure, I, at length, made shift to fasten my thoughts upon a theme which had no manner of connection with it. While I was pursuing my meditations, Mr. Unwin and family quite out of sight, my attention was suddenly called home again by the words which had been continually playing in my mind, and were, at length, repeated with such importunity that I could not help regarding them,—'The Lord God of truth will do this.' I was effectually convinced that they were not of my own production, and accordingly I received from them some assurance of success; but my unbelief and fearfulness robbed me of much of the comfort they were intended to convey; though I have since had many a blessed experience of the same kind, for which I can never be sufficiently thankful. I immediately began to negotiate the affair, and in a few days it was entirely concluded."

Economy was one urgent motive for this change, which in other respects also was so consonant with his inclinations. "I find it impossible," he says to Hill, "to proceed any longer in my present course without danger of bankruptcy. I have therefore en-

tered into an agreement with the Rev. Mr. Unwin to lodge and board with him. The family are the most agreeable in the world. They live in a special good house, and in a very genteel way. They are all exactly what I could wish them to be, and I know I shall be as happy with them as I can be on this side of the sun. I did not dream of the matter till about five days ago; but now the whole is settled. I shall transfer myself thither as soon as I have satisfied all demands upon me here[32]."

On Nov. 11, 1765, Cowper took possession of his new abode, and became an inmate of Mr. Unwin's family. "I here found a place of rest," he says, "prepared for me by God's own hand, where he has given me abundant means of furtherance in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus, both by the study of his word, and communion with his dear disciples. May nothing but death interrupt it! Peace be with the reader, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen." With these words he concludes the account of his own life and sufferings, which he drew up at Huntingdon, for the satisfaction of these new friends.

But Cowper had not yet learned to proportion his ways to his means. In the same communication that announced his intended removal, and acknowledged the danger of outrunning his income, which rendered it necessary, he tells his friend,

> "I wrote to you about ten days ago,
> Soliciting a quick return of gold,
> To purchase certain horse that like me well."

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[32] Nov. 5, 1765.

"I am become a professed horseman," he says in a former letter, "and do hereby assume to myself the style and title of the Knight of the Bloody Spur. It has cost me much to bring this point to bear; but I think I have at last accomplished it[33]."

When he first learnt from Lady Hesketh how kindly his relations were disposed to act towards him, he was much affected by this proof of their regard. "If they really interest themselves," said he, "in my welfare, it is a mark of their great charity for one who has been a disappointment and a vexation to them ever since he has been of consequence to be either. My friend the major's behaviour to me, after all he suffered by my abandoning his interest and my own in so miserable a manner, is a noble instance of generosity and true greatness of mind; and, indeed, I know no man in whom those qualities are more conspicuous. One need only furnish him with an opportunity to display them, and they are always ready to show themselves in his words and actions, and even in his countenance, at a moment's warning. I have great reason to be thankful I have lost none of my acquaintance, but those whom I determined not to keep. I am sorry this class is so numerous[34]."

He had not long been domesticated with the Unwins, when he received a letter from his uncle Ashley, "giving him to understand in the gentlest terms, and in such as *he* was sure to choose, that the family were not a little displeased at having learnt that he kept a servant; and that he maintained a boy also, whom he had brought

[33] Aug. 14, 1765. [34] To Lady Hesketh, Aug. 1, 1765.

with him from St. Albans." Two or three letters were exchanged between them on this subject, and Cowper did not alter his plan, though his uncle told him as softly as he could, there was danger lest the offence taken by his relations should operate to the prejudice of his income. Shortly after this correspondence had ceased, " my brother," says Cowper, " went to town, where his stay was short, and, when I saw him next, gave me the following intelligence: that my cousin (the colonel) had been the mover of this storm; that finding me inflexible, he had convened the family on the occasion, had recommended it to them not to give to one who knew so little how to make a right use of their bounty, and declared that for his own part he would not, and that he had accordingly withdrawn his contribution. My brother added, however, that my good friend Sir Thomas (Hesketh) had stepped into his place, and made good the deficiency[35]."

The colonel's contribution, however, was not withdrawn[36]; his object seems to have been to make his kinsman feel the propriety of observing a due economy under his peculiar circumstances, and the injustice of doing generous acts at the expense of others. On this occasion Cowper received two affecting proofs of

[35] To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 2, 1786.

[36] " Being thus informed," says Cowper to Lady Hesketh in this letter, " or as it seems now misinformed, you will not wonder, my dear, that I no longer regarded the colonel as my friend, or that I have not inquired after him from that day to the present. But when speaking of him you express yourself thus, *who you know has been so constantly your friend!* I feel myself more than reconciled to him; I feel a sincere affection

sincere friendship. The first may best be related in his own words to Lady Hesketh: "I have a word or two more to say on the same subject. While this troublesome matter was in agitation, and I expected little less than to be abandoned by the family, I received an anonymous letter, in a hand entirely strange to me, by the post. It was conceived in the kindest and most benevolent terms imaginable, exhorting me not to distress myself with fears lest the threatened event should take place; for that, whatever deduction of my income might happen, the defect should be supplied by a person who loved me tenderly and approved my conduct. I wish I knew who dictated this letter. I have seen, not long since, a style most excessively like it." Evidently he supposed it to have come from Lady Hesketh herself; and from her, .. or her sister Theodora, .. no doubt it came.

The other proof of true friendship was given by Mrs. Unwin: "Though I had not," he says, "been ten months in the family, Mrs. Unwin generously offered me my place under her roof, with all the same accommodation, (and undertook to manage that matter with her husband,) at half the stipulated payment."

After his removal from lodgings a pause of some

* for him, convinced that he could not have acted toward me, as my brother had heard, without your knowledge of it."

John Cowper could not have been misinformed, as his brother chose to believe. The fact appears to have been as stated in the text. The colonel threatened seriously,—but did not choose to be outdone in generosity towards a kinsman whom he loved; and was probably satisfied when he saw how much the next year's expenses were reduced.

months ensued in his correspondence with Lady Hesketh. When she had renewed it, he wrote thus to her:

MY DEAR COUSIN, *Huntingdon, March 6, 1766.*

I have for some time past imputed your silence to the cause which you yourself assign for it, viz. to my change of situation; and was even sagacious enough to account for the frequency of your letters to me while I lived alone, from your attention to me in a state of such solitude, as seemed to make it an act of particular charity to write to me. I bless God for it, I was happy even then; solitude has nothing gloomy in it if the soul points upwards. St. Paul tells his Hebrew converts, "Ye are come (already come) to Mount Sion, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." When this is the case, as surely it was with them, or the Spirit of Truth had never spoken it, there is an end of the melancholy and dulness of life at once. You will not suspect me, my dear cousin, of a design to understand this passage literally. But this, however, it certainly means; that a lively faith is able to anticipate, in some measure, the joys of that heavenly society which the soul shall actually possess hereafter.

Since I have changed my situation, I have found still greater cause of thanksgiving to the Father of all mercies. The family with whom I live are Christians; and it has pleased the Almighty to bring me to the

knowledge of them, that I may want no means of improvement in that temper and conduct which he is pleased to require in all his servants.

My dear cousin! one half of the Christian world would call this madness, fanaticism, and folly: but are not these things warranted by the word of God, not only in the passages I have cited, but in many others? If we have no communion with God here, surely we can expect none hereafter. A faith that does not place our conversation in heaven; that does not warm the heart, and purify it too; that does not, in short, govern our thought, word, and deed, is no faith, nor will it obtain for us any spiritual blessing here, or hereafter. Let us see, therefore, my dear cousin, that we do not deceive ourselves in a matter of such infinite moment. The world will be ever telling us, that we are good enough; and the world will vilify us behind our backs. But it is not the world which tries the heart; that is the prerogative of God alone. My dear cousin! I have often prayed for you behind your back, and now I pray for you to your face. There are many who would not forgive me this wrong; but I have known you so long, and so well, that I am not afraid of telling you how sincerely I wish for your growth in every Christian grace, in every thing that may promote and secure your everlasting welfare.

I am obliged to Mrs. Cowper for the book, which, you perceive, arrived safe. I am willing to consider it as an intimation on her part, that she would wish me to write to her, and shall do it accordingly. My circumstances are rather particular, such as call upon my friends, those I mean who are truly such, to take

some little notice of me; and will naturally make those, who are not such in sincerity, rather shy of doing it. To this I impute the silence of many with regard to me, who, before the affliction that befell me, were ready enough to converse with me.

Yours, ever,

W. C.

He was probably right in accounting for the former frequency of her letters, as well as for their latter cessation. Lady Hesketh had a sisterly love for him, but he addressed her in a strain to which no one who did not entirely sympathise in his religious views could have any satisfaction in replying. That sympathy he found in Mrs. Cowper, wife of the colonel, who was first cousin both to him and her husband, and sister to Martin Madan, at that time chaplain to the Lock Hospital, and one of the most distinguished of those clergy who in their style of preaching approached the then rising body of the Methodists, in proportion as they departed from the standard of the church. Cowper, when his malady was at the height, had sent for this kinsman, whom he used to think an enthusiast; he fancied that if there were any balm in Gilead he must be the physician to administer it. Mrs. Cowper appears to have been one of her brother's converts; the book alluded to in the preceding letter was Pearsall's Meditations, and it gave her cousin an occasion of writing to her, which was all that he had waited for; for the renewal of intercourse with his friends was a point on which he was peculiarly sensitive. He says to her, "My friends must excuse me

if I write to none but those who lay it fairly in my way to do so. The inference I am apt to draw from their silence is, that they wish me to be silent too[37]."

In this letter he says, "Your brother Martin has been very kind to me, having written to me twice, in a style which, though it was once irksome to me, to say the least, I now know how to value. I pray God to forgive me the many light things I have both said and thought of him and his labours. Hereafter I shall consider him as a burning and a shining light, and as one of those who, having turned many to righteousness, shall shine hereafter as the stars for ever and ever. So much for the state of my heart: as to my spirits, I am cheerful and happy, and having peace with God, have peace within myself. For the continuance of this blessing, I trust to Him who gave it; and they who trust in Him shall never be confounded." The lady in whose house he lived, was, he says, so excellent a person, and regarded him with a friendship so truly Christian, that he could almost fancy his own mother restored to life again, to compensate to him for all the friends he had lost, and all his connexions broken.

His correspondence with Mrs. Cowper became as frequent now as it had been with Lady Hesketh, and except when the Unwins were mentioned, it was wholly of a religious character: "I thank God," he says, "that I have those among my kindred to whom I can write without reserve my sentiments upon this subject, as I do to you. A letter upon any other subject is more insipid to me than even my task was when a

[37] March 11, 1766.

schoolboy; and I say not this in vain glory,—God forbid! but to show you what the Almighty, whose name I am unworthy to mention, has done for me the greatest of sinners. Once he was a terror to me, and his service, oh what a weariness it was! Now I can say, I love Him and his holy name, and am never so happy as when I speak of his mercies to me[38]."

At this time he had many anxious thoughts about taking orders. "I believe[39]," said he, "every new convert is apt to think himself called upon for that purpose: but it has pleased God, by means which there is no need to particularize, to give me full satisfaction as to the propriety of declining it. Indeed, they who have the least idea of what I have suffered from the dread of public exhibitions, will readily excuse my never attempting them hereafter. In the mean time, if it please the Almighty, I may be an instrument of turning many to the truth in a private way, and hope that my endeavours in this way have not been entirely unsuccessful[40]. Had I the zeal of Moses, I should need an Aaron to be my spokesman."

[38] Sept. 3, 1766. [39] To Mrs. Cowper, Oct. 20, 1766.

[40] In the Memoir which Mr. Greatheed "revised, corrected, and recommended," it is said, "The usefulness to which he alludes in this passage, was no less than the conversion of almost all Mr. Unwin's family. The consequent alteration of their conduct excited the surprise and displeasure of their former intimates, whose round of amusements had long been undisturbed by appearances of genuine godliness. They regretted that a man of Mr. Cowper's accomplishments should have been spoiled for society by religion, and still more, that his delusion should have infected a family so extensively connected as Mr. Unwin's with the polite inhabitants. That con-

Mrs. Cowper had inquired particularly concerning the manner in which he passed his time. He replied, "As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none: the place indeed swarms with them; and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessaries to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval, I either read, in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within

nexion was soon dissolved: and their resentment of the change vented itself in a calumny, to which a gross ignorance of the principles of Christian friendship afforded the sole support."

In the same narrative it is stated that Mrs. Unwin "had been remarkable for gaiety and vivacity; but that she soon, notwithstanding, fully entered into Mr. Cowper's religious views, and discovered a change of character that was far from being agreeable to her fashionable acquaintance."

This is altogether inconsistent with Cowper's own account, which has been faithfully incorporated in the text.

doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read, and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns, or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you*, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life, above all for a heart to like it."

The last of his letters, during this part of his life, to Lady Hesketh, gives a striking description of the neighbourhood, and of his own state of mind.

MY DEAR LADY HESKETH, Jan. 30, 1767.

I am glad you spent your summer in a place so agreeable to you. As to me, my lot is cast in a country where we have neither woods nor commons, nor pleasant prospects: all flat and insipid; in the summer adorned only with blue willows, and in the winter covered with a flood. Such it is at present: our bridges shaken almost in pieces; our poor willows

torn away by the roots, and our haycocks almost afloat. Yet even here we are happy; at least I am so; and if I have no groves with benches conveniently disposed, nor commons overgrown with thyme to regale me, neither do I want them. You thought to make my mouth water at the charms of Taplow, but you see you are disappointed.

My dear cousin! I am a living man; and I can never reflect that I am so, without recollecting at the same time that I have infinite cause of thanksgiving and joy. This makes every place delightful to me, where I can have leisure to meditate upon those mercies by which I live, and indulge a vein of gratitude to that gracious God, who has snatched me like a brand out of the burning. Where had I been but for his forbearance and long suffering? even with those who shall never see his face in hope, to whom the name of Jesus, by the just judgement of God, is become a torment instead of a remedy. Thoughtless and inconsiderate wretch that I was! I lived as if I had been my own creator, and could continue my existence to what length, and in what state I pleased; as if dissipation was the narrow way which leads to life, and a neglect of the blessed God would certainly end in the enjoyment of Him. But it pleased the Almighty to convince me of my fatal error before it indeed became such; to convince me that in communion with Him we may find that happiness for which we were created, and that a life without God in the world, is a life of trash, and the most miserable delusion. Oh how had my own corruptions, and Satan together, blinded and befooled me! I thought the service of my Maker

and Redeemer a tedious and unnecessary labour; I despised those who thought otherwise; and if they spoke of the love of God, I pronounced them madmen. As if it were possible to serve and to love the Almighty Being too much, with whom we must dwell for ever, or be for ever miserable without him.

Would I were the only one that had ever dreamed this dream of folly and wickedness! but the world is filled with such, who furnish a continual proof of God's almost unprovokeable mercy; who set up for themselves in a spirit of independence upon Him who made them, and yet enjoy that life by his bounty, which they abuse to his dishonour. You remember me, my dear cousin, one of this trifling and deluded multitude. Great and grievous afflictions were applied to awaken me out of this deep sleep, and, under the influence of divine grace, have, I trust, produced the effect for which they were intended. If the way in which I had till that time proceeded had been according to the word and will of God, God had never interposed to change it. That He did is certain; though others may not be so sensible of that interposition, yet I am sure of it. To think as I once did therefore must be wrong. Whether to think as I now do be right or not, is a question that can only be decided by the word of God; at least it is capable of no other decision, till the great day determine it finally. I see, and see plainly, in every page and period of that word, my former heedlessness and forgetfulness of God condemned. I see a life of union and communion with him inculcated and enjoined as an essential requisite. To this, therefore, it must be the business of our lives to attain, and

happy is he who makes the greatest progress in it. This is no fable, but it is our life. If we stand at the left hand of Christ while we live, we shall stand there too in the judgement. The separation must be begun in this world, which in that day shall be made for ever. My dear cousin! may the Son of God, who shall then assign to each his everlasting station, direct and settle all your thoughts upon this important subject. Whether you must think as I do, or not, is not the question; but it is indeed an awful question, whether the word of God be the rule of our actions, and his Spirit the principle by which we act. Search the Scriptures; for in them ye believe ye have eternal life.

This letter will be Mr. Howe's[41] companion to London. I wish his company were more worthy of him, but it is not fit it should be less. I pray God to bless you, and remember you where I never forget those I love.

Yours and Sir Thomas's affectionate friend,

WM. COWPER.

Here the correspondence with Lady Hesketh appears to have ceased: he could take no pleasure at this time in any other strain, and she probably thought that it was dangerous for him to dwell constantly upon this. But to Mrs. Cowper he continued to write; and from what he says to her, it may be inferred that for the reason assigned he had dropped the communication with his more beloved cousin. "To find[42]," he says,

[41] Probably some work of Howe's which he was sending to Lady Hesketh.

[42] March 11, 1767.

" those whom I love clearly and strongly persuaded of evangelical truth, gives me a pleasure superior to any this world can afford me. Judge then, whether your letter, in which the body and substance of a saving faith is so evidently set forth, could meet with a lukewarm reception at my hands, or be entertained with indifference! Would you know the true reason of my long silence? Conscious that my religious principles are generally excepted against, and that the conduct they produce, wherever they are heartily maintained, is still more the object of disapprobation than those principles themselves; and remembering that I had made both the one and the other known to you, without having any clear assurance that our faith in Jesus was of the same stamp and character, I could not help thinking it possible that you might disapprove both my sentiments and practice; that you might think the one unsupported by Scripture, and the other whimsical, and unnecessarily strict and rigorous, and consequently would be rather pleased with the suspension of a correspondence, which a different way of thinking upon so momentous a subject as that we wrote upon, was likely to render tedious and irksome to you.

" I have told you the truth from my heart; forgive me these injurious suspicions, and never imagine that I shall hear from you upon this delightful theme without a real joy, or without prayer to God to prosper you in the way of his truth, his sanctifying and saving truth."

The younger Unwin happened to be coming from London to Huntingdon at that time, he gave him an

introduction, and desired him to call on Mrs. Cowper in his way. "If you knew him," said he, "as well as I do, you would love him as much. But I leave the young man to speak for himself, which he is very able to do. He is ready possessed of an answer to every question you can possibly ask concerning me; and knows my *whole story*, from first to last[43]." After his friend's return, he acknowledged wherefore he had thus introduced him. "My dear cousin," said he, "you sent my friend Unwin home to us charmed with your kind reception of him, and with every thing he saw at the Park. Shall I once more give you a peep into my vile and deceitful heart? What motive do you think lay at the bottom of my conduct, when I desired him to call upon you? I did not suspect, at first, that pride and vain glory had any share in it; but quickly after I had recommended the visit to him, I discovered, in that fruitful soil, the very root of the matter. You know I am a stranger here; all such are suspected characters, unless they bring their credentials with them. To this moment, I believe, it is matter of speculation in the place, whence I came, and to whom I belong.

"Though my friend, you may suppose, before I was admitted an inmate here, was satisfied that I was not a mere vagabond, and has, since that time, received more convincing proofs of my *sponsibility;* yet I could not resist the opportunity of furnishing him with ocular demonstration of it, by introducing him to one of my most splendid connexions; that when he hears

[43] March 14, 1767.

me called ' *That fellow Cowper*,' which has happened heretofore, he may be able, upon unquestionable evidence, to assert my gentlemanhood, and relieve me from the weight of that opprobrious appellation. Oh Pride! Pride! it deceives with the subtlety of a serpent, and seems to walk erect, though it crawls upon the earth. How will it twist and twine itself about, to get from under the Cross, which it is the glory of our Christian calling to be able to bear with patience and good will. They who can guess at the heart of a stranger,—and you especially, who are of a compassionate temper,—will be more ready, perhaps, to excuse me, in this instance, than I can be to excuse myself. But, in good truth, it was abominable pride of heart, indignation, and vanity, and deserves no better name[44]."

In this letter he expresses his satisfaction that Mrs. Cowper was now acquainted so *particularly* with *all* the circumstances of his story. " Her secrecy and discretion," he said, " might, he knew, be trusted with any thing. A thread of mercy ran through all the intricate mazes of those afflictive providences, which were so mysterious to himself at the time, and which must ever remain so to all who would not see what was the great design of them."

Cowper had always been fond of plants. When he lived in the Temple he used to purchase myrtles almost every year in Covent Garden : it was necessary thus annually to replace them, " because, even in that airy situation," he said, " they were sure to lose their

[44] April 3, 1767.

leaf[45] in winter, and seldom recovered it again in spring[46]." He now commenced florist and horticulturist at Huntingdon. "If the major," says he to Mrs. Cowper, "can make up a small packet of seeds, that will make a figure in a garden, where we have little else besides jessamine and honey-suckle, (such a packet as may be put into one's fob), I will promise to take great care of them, as I ought to value natives of the Park. They must not be such, however, as require great skill in the management, for at present I have no skill to spare." Unwin brought the seeds with him: "they will spring up," said Cowper, "like so many mementos to remind me of my friends at the Park[47]." His attention was directed more to the useful than the ornamental departments of horticulture. "Having commenced gardening," he says to Hill, "I study the arts of pruning, sowing, and planting; and enterprise every thing in that way, from melons down to cabbages. I have a large garden to display my abilities in; and were we twenty miles nearer London I might turn higgler, and serve your honour with cauliflowers and brocoli at the best hand."

Careless as Cowper had been of acquiring any legal reputation, it appears that some respect was paid to him in the profession; his determination to take no

[45] So Cowley says of a nobler plant, and finds in the fact a similitude, the truth of which Cowper would have felt.

Rura laudamus merito poetæ;
Rure floremus; dominoque laurum,
Sole gaudentem, necat oppidorum
Nubilus aer.

[46] March 14, 1767. [47] May 14, 1767.

farther part in the common business of the world was known only to his most intimate connexions, and a letter reached him at Huntingdon, announcing his appointment to the honorary office of lecturer at Lyon's Inn. Upon this he wrote to Hill in that pleasant and natural strain from which he never departed in his correspondence with that old and confidential friend: "Dear Sephus, Notwithstanding it is so agreeable a thing to read law lectures to the students of Lyon's Inn, especially to the reader himself, I must beg leave to waive it. Danby Pickering must be the happy man; and I heartily wish him joy of his deputyship. As to the treat, I think if it goes before the lecture, it will be apt to blunt the apprehension of the students; and if it comes after, it may erase from their memories impressions so newly made. I could wish, therefore, that for their benefit and behoof, this circumstance were omitted. But if it be absolutely necessary, I hope Mr. Salt, or whoever takes the conduct of it, will see that it be managed with the frugality and temperance becoming so learned a body. I shall be obliged to you if you will present my respects to Mr. Treasurer Salt, and express my concern, at the same time, that he had the trouble of sending me two letters upon the occasion. The first of them never came to hand[48]."

In his next letter, answering item by item the reply which he had received to this, he says, "Fourthly, I do recollect that I myself am a little guilty of what I blame so much in Mr. E. having returned you so facetious an answer to your serious inquiry concerning the entertainment to be given, or not to be given, to

[48] Nov. 8, 1765.

the gentlemen of Lyon's Inn, that you must needs have been at a loss to collect from it my real intentions. My sincere desire, however, in this respect is, that they may fast; and being supported in this resolution, not only by an assurance that I can, and therefore ought, to make a better use of my money, but also by the examples of my predecessors in the same business, Mr. Barrington and Mr. Schutz, I have no longer any doubt concerning the propriety of condemning them to abstinence upon this occasion; and cannot but wish that point may be carried, if it can be done without engaging you in the trouble of any disagreeable haggling and higgling and twisting and wriggling to save my money[49]."

Having inquired whether his "exchequer was full or empty, and whether the revenue of last year was yet come in, that he might proportion his payments to the exigencies of his affairs;" his chancellor of the exchequer returned an answer which called forth a lively expression of satisfaction: "I am glad that you have received your money on my account, and am still more pleased that you have so much in bank, after the remittances already made. But that which increases my joy to the highest pitch of possible augmentation, is that you expect to receive more shortly." The satisfaction was not of long continuance: after a few months he says to Sephus, "If every dealer and chapman was connected with creditors like you, the poor commissioners of bankrupts would be ruined. I can only wonder at you, considering my knack at running in debt, and my slender ability to pay. After

[49] Dec. 3, 1765.

all, I am afraid that the poor stock must suffer.—My finances will never be able to satisfy these craving necessities, without leaving my debt to you entirely unsatisfied. And though I know you are sincere in what you say, and as willing to wait for your money as heart can wish, yet *quære*, whether the next half year, which will bring its expenses with it, will be more propitious to you than the present? The succeeding half years may bear a close resemblance to their insolvent predecessors continually; and unless we break bank some time or other, your proposal of payment may be always what it is at present. What matters it, therefore, to reprieve the stock, which must come to execution at last[50]?"

The sacrifice of stock probably removed all present pressure, and the terms upon which the Unwins had entertained him as one of the family, must have placed him comparatively at ease, when their establishment was broken up by the dreadful circumstance of Mr. Unwin's death. In July, 1767, going on a Sunday morning to serve his church, he was thrown from his horse, and the back part of his skull was fractured[51]. "At nine o'clock," says Cowper, "he was in perfect health, and as likely to live twenty years as either of us; and before ten was stretched speechless and senseless upon a

[50] Oct. 27, 1766.

[51] A biographer of Cowper, when he relates this event, annexes the following note: "Non-residence can never be reconciled with the full and due discharge of the duties of a Christian ministry. It has always appeared to us, therefore, singularly inconsistent with the piety of the Unwins to have encouraged such a dereliction. Nor does it seem remote from an evident dispensation, that the stay of the family should be

flock bed, in a poor cottage, where (it being impossible to remove him) he died on Thursday evening. I heard his dying groans, the effect of great agony, for he was a strong man, and much convulsed in his last moments. The few short intervals of sense that were indulged him, he spent in earnest prayer, and in expressions of a firm trust and confidence in the only Saviour. To that strong hold we must all resort at last, if we would have hope in our death. When every other refuge fails, we are glad to fly to the only shelter to which we can repair to any purpose; and happy is it for us, when the false ground we have chosen for ourselves, being broken under us, we find ourselves obliged to have recourse to the rock which can never be shaken—when this is our lot, we receive great and undeserved mercy [52]."

To Mrs. Cowper he says, "this aweful dispensation has left an impression upon our spirits, which will not presently be worn off... May it be a lesson to us to watch, since we know not the day, nor the hour, when the Lord cometh. The effect of it upon my circumstances will only be a change of the place of my abode. For I shall still, by God's leave, continue with Mrs. Unwin, whose behaviour to me has always been that of a

thus awefully removed in the very act of inconsistency. But who shall dare

> To penetrate the inscrutable designs
> Of Him, whose council is his sovereign will?"

When Dr. Memes called to mind these verses, he ought to have suppressed his note.

[52] To Mr. Hill, July 16.

mother to a son. We know not yet where we shall settle; but we trust that the Lord, whom we seek, will go before us, and prepare a rest for us. We have employed our friend Haweis, Dr. Conyers of Helmsley, in Yorkshire, and Mr. Newton of Olney, to look out a place for us; but at present are entirely ignorant under which of the three we shall settle, or whether under either. I have written to my aunt Madan, to desire Martin to assist us with his inquiries."

CHAP. VII.

COWPER'S REMOVAL TO OLNEY. HIS BROTHER'S DEATH.

ALEXANDER KNOX, in his admirable letter on Divine Providence[1], when he observes how extremely difficult it is to find genuine specimens of special superintendence, mentions Cowper as one of the extraordinary instances in which it is almost impossible for those who are capable of discerning moral qualities, and appreciating moral effects, not to recognise the marks of providential designation: "I grant," he says, "there was (in his case) something awefully obscure; but through that obscurity, such rays of providential light dart forth, as to make the special designation not less clear than the singular sufferings were mysterious." As another example he instances Mr. Newton, one of the three clergymen of whom Cowper and Mrs. Unwin thought so highly, that they were willing to settle

[1] Remains, vol. ii. 263—264.

under the ministry of either, and seemed to have no other choice in settling than that they might be under one of them, or some minister of the same description.

Mr. Newton's life is too remarkable in all its circumstances to be treated episodically and epitomized in this place. Suffice it here to say, that he had been captain of a Liverpool slave ship; and that after much suffering, and many deliverances, which might well be deemed providential, wakening to a sense of God's mercy, had taken orders in the established church, and was then curate of Olney. They knew him only by report at the time of Mr. Unwin's death. About six months before that dreadful event, Dr. Conyers had been taking his degree in divinity at Cambridge, and there became acquainted with the younger Unwin: what he heard from him of his mother's religious character, induced him to mention her to Mr. Newton, and request that when he should be passing through Huntingdon he would take the opportunity of making her a visit. "That visit, so important in its consequences to the destiny of Cowper, happened to take place within a few days after the calamitous death of Mr. Unwin[2]." It was indeed a comfort to meet with such an adviser at such a time. He proposed that they should fix their abode at Olney, and offered to look out a house for them, and assist in their removal. Accordingly he engaged one so near the vicarage in which he lived, that by opening a doorway in the garden wall, they could communicate without going into the street. It was necessary that they should remove at Michaelmas,

[2] Hayley.

and as the house was not ready for their reception, Mr. Newton seems to have received them as his guests.

" I have no map to consult at present," says Cowper in his first letter from Olney, to his friend Sephus, " but by what remembrance I have of this place in the last I saw, it lies at the northernmost point of the county. We are just five miles beyond Newport Pagnell. I am willing to suspect that you make this inquiry with a *view* to an *interview*, when time shall serve. We may possibly be settled in our own house in about a month, where so good a friend of mine will be extremely welcome to Mrs. Unwin. We shall have a bed, and a warm fireside at your service, if you can come before next summer; and if not, a parlour that looks the north wind full in the face, where you may be as cool as in the groves of Valombrosa[3]."

The part of the country in which Cowper had now set up his rest, is called by Hayley pleasing and picturesque. In comparison with Huntingdon it is so; not with the north of England, not with the west, not with the Severn counties. But there are few countries which a man disposed to seek for pleasure in rural objects may not find pleasing, few which an artist will not render picturesque; and Cowper has made Olney and its neighbourhood poetical ground. The town, which is the most northerly in Buckinghamshire, consisted of one long street, the houses built of stone, but the far greater number thatched; the church large, and remarkable for its lofty spire. Lace making was the business of the place, a sedentary and unwhole-

[3] Oct. 10, 1767.

some employment[4]; and a great proportion of the inhabitants were miserably poor. Lace-making and straw-platting, indeed, used to employ so many women, and so many children of all ages in this county, that the farmers even found it difficult to obtain hands for their ordinary work[5].

At Olney the Ouse changes its character, and its course becomes so winding that the distance from that place to St. Neot's, which is about twenty miles by land, is about seventy by the stream. This has not escaped Drayton in his description of this "far wan-

[4] Mr. Lysons observes, in his Magna Britannia, that "persons travelling through the counties where this manufacture prevails, have been struck with the sickly appearance of the women and children employed in it."

[5] "When the Earl of Bridgewater came first to his estate at Ashridge (in this county) he found the boys unacquainted with any kind of husbandry, and unwilling to attend to any other employment but that which their mothers and sisters had taught them, viz. the platting of straw and making of lace. His lordship's first attention therefore was to root out this effeminacy, and instil into them manly principles, and make them serviceable in employments in the field." This he effected, "and instead of seeing great lads, seventeen or eighteen years of age, sitting by their mother's side platting straw, or weaving lace, you saw at Ashridge many much younger occupied in the park, in the different employment of the seasons of the year: and much interest was made by boys to get into those employments."—*St. John Priest's View of the Agriculture of Buckinghamshire*, p. 319.

This Report noticed as a good custom which prevailed at Olney, and at no other place, that "farmers plough waste lands for the poor to plant potatoes, find half the seed, and take half the crop." P. 346.

dering" river, which he invokes Invention "exactly to set down."

> Ouse having Oulney past, as she were waxed mad,
> From her first stayder course immediately doth gad,
> And in meandered gyres doth whirl herself about,
> That, this way, here and there, back, forward, in and out;
> And like a wanton girl, oft doubling in her gait,
> In labyrinth-like turns and twinings intricate,
> Thro those rich fields doth run.

But it was not for any attractions of the surrounding country, nor for any convenience of place or habitation, that Cowper and Mrs. Unwin had fixed upon Olney for their abode. He had once been what he called "an extravagant tramper," and thought that he had done himself "no good by pilgrimages of immoderate length[6]." The walks here were beautiful, "but it was a walk to get at them," and they were only for fine weather: at other times "a gravel walk, thirty yards long, afforded but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty, yet," he said, "it was all they had to move on for eight months in the year[7]." He no longer kept a horse; the chief reason for that expense ceased when he removed too far from Cambridge to meet his brother once a week half way. And indeed he could now indulge in no superfluous expenditure, Mrs. Unwin's means being so much reduced by her husband's death, that their joint incomes did not more than suffice for their frugal establishment. The sole motive which directed them in their choice was that they might be under the pastoral care of Mr. Newton.

It is said by one of Cowper's biographers that

[6] To Lady Hesketh, May 1, 1786.

[7] To Mr. Newton, Aug. 5, 1786.

though he had "clearly discerned and warmly embraced the leading truths of the gospel," he was till now "a stranger to the advantages of an evangelical ministry:" .. the phraseology shows from what school the observation comes. "Their days," it is said by the same person, "were spent nearly as at Huntingdon, except the differences produced by a substitution of frequent evangelical worship for the daily form of prayer; the advantages of a more extended religious intercourse; and the peculiar friendship of Mr. Newton." That friendship could not be estimated above its value, Mr. Newton being a man whom it was impossible not to admire for his strength of heart, and the warmth and sincerity of his affections, and his vigorous intellect, and his sterling worth. A sincerer friend Cowper could not have found; he might have found a more discreet one. The advantages of a more extended religious intercourse depend wholly upon the description of that intercourse; and the difference between what is called "frequent evangelical worship" and the daily form of prayer, could have been no difference for the better to Mrs. Unwin (the widow and the mother of a clergyman), and to a person in Cowper's state of mind must have been greatly for the worse. The morning service which he attended every day at Huntingdon could induce no feelings except such as were calm and soothing and salutary, .. none which would make him leave the church with an excited pulse, a flushed cheek, and a heated and throbbing head.

But what was likely to be the effect when he entered at Olney upon what has been called "a course of

decided Christian happiness;" when it was "by no means a rare occurrence to find the man of trembling sensibilities praying by the sick bed of the poorest cottager, or (the height of distress to a feeling mind) guiding the devotions of some miserable being, who, having lived for the world, attempted to seek God only in the departing moments of existence[8]?" Mr. Newton had established prayer meetings in his parish, and Cowper was required to take an active part at these meetings, .. he who, by his own account, was one of those persons "to whom a public exhibition of themselves on any occasion is mortal poison[9]!" We are assured, and no doubt with truth, that at these times he "poured forth his heart before God in earnest intercession, with a devotion equally simple, sublime, and fervent, adapted to the unusual combination of elevated genius, exquisite sensibility, and profound piety, that distinguished his mind." Mr. Greatheed, by whom this was said in Cowper's funeral sermon, proceeds to say, "it was, I believe, only on such occasions as these, that his constitutional diffidence was felt by him as a burden during this happy portion of his life. I have heard him say, that when he expected to take the lead in your social worship, his mind was always greatly agitated for some hours preceding. But his trepidation wholly subsided as soon as he began to speak in prayer; and that timidity, which he invariably felt at every appearance before his fellow creatures, gave

[8] Mr. Cecil says, "Mr. Newton used to consider him as a sort of curate, from his constant attendance upon the sick and afflicted in that large and necessitous parish."

[9] See p. 112.

place to an awful yet delightful consciousness of the presence of his Saviour."

Mr. Newton had

A frame of adamant, a soul of fire[10];

nothing could shake his nerves. But for Cowper to visit the sick and the dying, and to prepare himself by hours of nervous agitation for taking the lead in a prayer-meeting, with a constitution like his, and a mind which had already once been overthrown, .. what could Dr. Cotton, if the question had been proposed to him, .. what could any practitioner who was acquainted with the circumstances of the case, or any person capable of forming an opinion upon such subjects have expected .. but the consequences that ensued?

Several years afterwards Lady Hesketh delivered her opinion to her sister Theodora upon the "course of decided Christian happiness" into which Cowper had been led when he settled under the ministry of Mr. Newton. "Mr. Newton is an excellent man, I make no doubt," said she; "and to a strong minded man like himself might have been of great use: but to such a mind, .. such a tender mind, .. and to such a wounded, yet lively imagination as our cousin's, I am persuaded that eternal praying and preaching were too much: nor could it, I think, be otherwise. One only proof of this I will give you, which our cousin mentioned a few days ago in casual conversation. The case was this. He was mentioning that for one or two summers he had found himself under the necessity of taking his walk in the middle of the day, which he

[10] Dr. Johnson.

thought had hurt him a good deal; 'but,' continued he, 'I could not help it, for it was when Mr. Newton was here, and we made it a rule to pass four days in the week together. We dined at one; and it was Mr. Newton's rule for tea to be on table at four o'clock, for at six we broke up.' 'Well then,' said I, 'if you had your time to yourself after six, you would have good time for an evening's walk, I should have thought.' 'No,' said he; 'after six we had service or lecture, or something of that kind, which lasted till supper.' I made no reply, but could not and cannot help thinking, they might have made a better use of a fine summer's evening than by shutting themselves up to make long prayers. I hope I honour religion, and feel a reverence for religious persons; but still, (though I own the generality of the world are too careless, and devote too little time to these exercises,) I do think there is something too puritanical in all this. Our Saviour, I am sure, constantly speaks against it, and blames the Pharisees in more places than one who dealt in vain repetitions, and who thought they should be heard for their much speaking. But I do not mean to give you my sentiments upon this conduct *generally*, but only as it might affect our cousin; and indeed, for him, I think it could not be either proper or wholesome [11]."

[11] Early Productions of Cowper, &c. p. 68—70. Hayley, though evidently writing under some restraint, expresses a like opinion. He says, "When the nerves are tender, and the imagination tremblingly alive, any fervid excess in the exercise of the purest piety may be attended with such perils to corporeal and mental health, as men of a more firm and hardy fibre would be far from apprehending. Perhaps the life that

The effect appears in his correspondence[12]. Though no man ever took more evident pleasure in conversing with his absent friends, he ceased writing to Lady Hesketh, and wrote only at long intervals to Mrs. Cowper. The character of his letters to Hill was changed: he still addressed him as Sephus, or dear Joe, but he wrote only on business; not coldly indeed, (for his affections were never chilled,) but briefly, and as if he were afraid of trespassing into a cheerful strain. Thanking him for "a full answer to an empty epistle," he says, "if Olney furnished any thing for your amusement, you should have it in return, but occurrences here are as scarce as cucumbers at Christmas[13]." Subjects for a letter were never wanting however when he looked for them; he could raise them in all places and at all times, as easily as he raised cucumbers in their season.

Cowper led on his settling in Olney had a tendency to increase the morbid propensity of his frame, though it was a life of admirable sanctity."—Vol. i. 98.

[12] Mr. Thomas Taylor has observed this. "Owing to some cause," he says, "for which we are unable to account, Cowper's correspondence with his friends became much less frequent after his settlement at Olney than it had formerly been: probably it might be attributed, in some degree at least, to his close intimacy with Mr. Newton, for they were seldom seven waking hours apart from each other. The same vein of genuine and unaffected piety, however, runs through those letters which he did write, and they abound with remarks of uncommon excellence."—P. 86.

Those remarks are all of the same vein. The truth is that one effect of what is called his "more extended religious intercourse" was to make that intercourse exclusive.

[13] June 16, 1768.

In the same letter he says, "I visited St. Alban's about a fortnight since in person, and I visit it every day in thought. The recollection of what passed there, and the consequences that followed it, fill my mind continually, and make the circumstances of a poor transient half-spent life so insipid and unaffecting, that I have no heart to think or write much about them. Whether the nation is worshiping Mr. Wilkes, or any other idol, is of little moment to one who hopes, and believes, that he shall shortly stand in the presence of the great and blessed God. I thank Him, that he has given me such a deep-impressed persuasion of this awful truth, as a thousand worlds would not purchase from me. It gives me a relish to every blessing, and makes every trouble light."

The motive for this journey to St. Alban's was a charitable one. Scanty, and indeed uncertain, as his own means were when he left Dr. Cotton's, he took upon himself the charge of a little boy who was in imminent danger of ruin through the depravity of his parents, who were moreover as poor as they were depraved. This boy he put to school at Huntingdon, removed him, on his own removal, to Olney, and went now to St. Alban's in order to bind him apprentice[14] to some useful trade.

The next letter to Hill was written on his friend's

[14] The boy, however, was fixed as an apprentice at Oundle. In Mr. Greatheed's Memoir it is said that he afterwards settled at Olney, and married a favourite servant of Mr. Unwin, whose daughter, by a former husband, was likewise brought up by that lady. "It is to be lamented that neither she nor her father-in-law proved worthy of the charitable advantages by which they were distinguished."

recovery from a dangerous illness, and Cowper took the fair occasion for entering upon a solemn strain.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE, Jan. 21, 1769.

I rejoice with you in your recovery, and that you have escaped from the hands of one from whose hands you will not always escape. Death is either the most formidable, or the most comfortable thing we have in prospect on this side of eternity. To be brought near to him, and to discern neither of these features in his face, would argue a degree of insensibility, of which I will not suspect my friend, whom I know to be a thinking man. You have been brought down to the sides of the grave, and you have been raised again by Him who has the keys of the invisible world; who opens, and none can shut; who shuts, and none can open. I do not forget to return thanks to Him on your behalf, and to pray that your life, which He has spared, may be devoted to his service. "Behold! I stand at the door and knock," is the word of Him, on whom both our mortal and immortal life depend, and blessed be his name! it is the word of one who wounds only that he may heal, and who waits to be gracious. The language of every such dispensation is, "Prepare to meet thy God." It speaks with the voice of mercy and goodness, for without such notices, whatever preparation we might make for other events, we should make none for this. My dear friend, I desire and pray, that when this last enemy shall come to execute an *unlimited* commission upon us, we may be found ready, being established and rooted in a well-grounded

faith in His name, who conquered and triumphed over him upon his Cross.

Yours ever,

W. C.

The temper in which this was received may be understood from Cowper's reply to the letter that answered it[15]. "I have a moment to spare, to tell you that your letter is just come to hand, and to thank you for it. I do assure you, the gentleness and candour of your manner engages my affection to you very much. You answer with mildness to an admonition which would have provoked many to anger. I have not time to add more, except just to hint, that if I am ever enabled to look forward to death with comfort, which, I thank God, is sometimes the case with me, I do not take my view of it from the top of my own works and deservings, though God is witness that the labour of my life is to keep a conscience void of offence towards Him. He is always formidable to me, but when I see him disarmed of his sting, by having sheathed it in the body of Christ Jesus."

Soon afterwards Hill invited him to London, wishing no doubt to bring him again into the circle of his relations, and within the influence of more genial circumstances. He replied:

DEAR JOE, 1769.

Sir Thomas crosses the Alps, and Sir Cowper, for that is his title at Olney, prefers his home to any other spot of earth in the world. Horace, observing this difference of temper in different persons, cried

[15] Jan. 29, 1769.

out a good many years ago, in the true spirit of poetry, "How much one man differs from another!" This does not seem a very sublime exclamation in English, but I remember we were taught to admire it in the original.

My dear friend, I am obliged to you for your invitation: but being long accustomed to retirement, which I was always fond of, I am now more than ever unwilling to revisit those noisy and crowded scenes, which I never loved, and which I now abhor. I remember you with all the friendship I ever professed, which is as much as I ever entertained for any man. But the strange and uncommon incidents of my life have given an entire new turn to my whole character and conduct, and rendered me incapable of receiving pleasure from the same employments and amusements of which I could readily partake in former days.

I love you and yours; I thank you for your continued remembrance of me, and shall not cease to be their and your

Affectionate friend,

and servant,

W. C.

In the September of this year he was summoned to Cambridge by a letter, stating that his brother was dangerously ill; he found him so on his arrival, but after ten days left him so far restored as to ride many miles without fatigue, and to have every symptom of returning health. These were fallacious symptoms. Cowper was again summoned in the ensuing February, and the case then had become desperate. The physician, says

he, writing to his cousin, Mrs. Cowper, "has little hope of his recovery, I believe I might say none at all, only being a friend he does not formally give him over by ceasing to visit him, lest it should sink his spirits. For my own part I have no expectation of his recovery, except by a signal interposition of Providence in answer to prayer. His case is clearly out of the reach of medicine; but I have seen many a sickness healed, where the danger has been equally threatening, by the only physician of value. I doubt not he will have an interest in your prayers, as he has in the prayers of many. May the Lord incline his ear, and give an answer of peace. I know it is good to be afflicted. I trust that you have found it so, and that under the teaching of God's own Spirit we shall both be purified. It is the desire of my soul to seek a better country, where God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of his people; and where, looking back upon the ways by which he has led us, we shall be filled with everlasting wonder, love, and praise[16]."

John Cowper died on the 20th of that month. The remarkable circumstances of his illness and death were related by his brother in letters written at or about the time, and afterwards in a connected narrative.

TO THE REV. W. UNWIN[17].

MY DEAR FRIEND, March 31, 1770.

I am glad that the Lord made you a fellow-labourer with us, in praying my dear brother out of darkness into light. It was a blessed work, and when

[16] March 5, 1770.

[17] This letter in Hayley is addressed to Mr. Newton; but

it shall be your turn to die in the Lord, and to rest from all your labours, that work shall follow you. I once entertained hopes of his recovery: from the moment when it pleased God to give him light in his soul, there was for four days such a visible amendment in his body as surprised us all. Dr. Glinn himself was puzzled, and began to think that all his threatening conjectures would fail of their accomplishment. I am well satisfied, that it was thus ordered, not for his own sake, but for the sake of us who had been so deeply concerned for his spiritual welfare, that he might be able to give such evident proof of the work of God upon his soul as should leave no doubt behind it. As to his friends at Cambridge they knew nothing of the matter. He never spoke of these things but to myself, nor to me when others were within hearing, except that he sometimes would speak in the presence of the nurse. He knew well to make the distinction between those who could understand him and those who could not; and that he was not in circumstances to maintain such a controversy as a declaration of his new views and sentiments would have exposed him to. Just after his death I spoke of this change to a dear friend of his, a fellow of the college, who had attended him through all his sickness with assiduity and tenderness. But he did not understand me.

I now proceed to mention such particulars as I can recollect, and which I had not an opportunity to insert in my letters to Olney; for I left Cambridge sud-

the original is in my hands: it is the earliest in Mr. Unwin's collection. None of the letters to Olney which are mentioned in it seem to have been preserved.

denly, and sooner than I expected. He was deeply impressed with a sense of the difficulties he should have to encounter, if it should please God to raise him again. He saw the necessity of being faithful, and the opposition he should expose himself to by being so. Under the weight of these thoughts he one day broke out in the following prayer, when only myself was with him. "O Lord, thou art light; and in thee is no darkness at all. Thou art the fountain of all wisdom, and it is essential to thee to be good and gracious. I am a child, O Lord, teach me how I should conduct myself! Give me the wisdom of the serpent, with the harmlessness of the dove! Bless the souls thou hast committed to the care of thy helpless miserable creature, who has no wisdom or knowledge of his own, and make me faithful to them for thy mercy's sake!" Another time he said, "How wonderful it is that God should look upon man; and how much more wonderful that he should look upon such a worm as I am! Yet he does look upon me, and takes the exactest notice of all my sufferings. He is present, and I see him (I mean by faith); and he stretches out his arms towards me"—and he then stretched out his own—"and he says, Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest!" He smiled and wept when he spoke these words. When he expressed himself upon these subjects, there was a weight and a dignity in his manner such as I never saw before. He spoke with the greatest deliberation, making a pause at the end of every sentence; and there was something in his air and in the tone of his voice inexpressibly solemn, unlike himself, unlike what I had ever seen in another.

This hath God wrought. I have praised him for his marvellous act, and have felt a joy of heart upon the subject of my brother's death, such as I never felt but in my own conversion. He is now before the throne; and yet a little while, and we shall meet never more to be divided.

Yours, my very dear friend, with my affectionate respects to yourself, and yours, W. C.

Postscript. A day or two before his death he grew so weak and was so very ill, that he required continual attendance, so that he had neither strength nor opportunity to say much to me. Only the day before, he said he had had a sleepless, but a composed and quiet night. I asked him if he had been able to collect his thoughts. He replied: "All night long I have endeavoured to think upon God and to continue in prayer. I had great peace and comfort; and what comfort I had came in that way." When I saw him the next morning at seven o'clock, he was dying, fast asleep, and exempted, in all appearance, from the sense of those pangs which accompany dissolution. I shall be glad to hear from you, my dear friend, when you can find time to write and are so inclined. The death of my beloved brother teems with many useful lessons. May God seal the instruction upon our hearts!

To Mrs. Cowper he says, "You judge rightly of the manner in which I have been affected by the Lord's late dispensation towards my brother. I found in it cause of sorrow that I had lost so near a relation, and one so deservedly dear to me, and that he left me just when our sentiments upon the most interesting

subject became the same; but much more cause of joy that it pleased God to give me clear and evident proof that he had changed his heart, and adopted him into the number of his children. For this I hold myself peculiarly bound to thank him, because he might have done all that he was pleased to do for him, and yet have afforded him neither strength nor opportunity to declare it. I doubt not that He enlightens the understandings, and works a gracious change in the hearts of many in their last moments, whose surrounding friends are not made acquainted with it.

"He told me that, from the time he was first ordained, he began to be dissatisfied with his religious opinions, and to suspect that there were greater things concealed in the Bible than were generally believed, or allowed, to be there. From the time when I first visited him, after my release from St. Albans, he began to read upon the subject. It was at that time I informed him of the views of divine truth which I had received in that school of affliction. He laid what I said to heart, and began to furnish himself with the best writers upon the controverted points, whose works he read with great diligence and attention, comparing them all the while with the Scripture. None ever truly and ingenuously sought the truth, but they found it. A spirit of earnest inquiry is the gift of God, who never says to any, seek ye my face in vain. Accordingly, about ten days before his death, it pleased the Lord to dispel all his doubts, and to reveal in his heart the knowledge of the Saviour, and to give him firm and unshaken peace in the belief of his ability and willingness to save. As to the affair of the fortune-teller, he never mentioned it to me, nor was there any such paper

found as you mention. I looked over all his papers before I left the place, and had there been such a one must have discovered it. I have heard the report from other quarters, but no other particulars than that the woman foretold him when he should die. I suppose there may be some truth in the matter, but whatever he might think of it before his knowledge of the truth, and however extraordinary her predictions might really be, I am satisfied that he had then received far other views of the wisdom and majesty of God, than to suppose that he would entrust his secret counsels to a vagrant who did not mean, I suppose, to be understood to have received her intelligence from the Fountain of Light, but thought herself sufficiently honoured by any who would give her credit for a secret intercourse of this kind with the Prince of Darkness."

The narrative, "faithfully transcribed from the original manuscript," was published after Cowper's death by Mr. Newton[18], and is here inserted in its appropriate place.

[18] It is a small pamphlet of thirty-six pages. Its full title is "ADELPHI. A Sketch of the Character and an Account of the last Illness of the late Rev. John Cowper, A.M. Fellow of Bennet College, Cambridge, who finished his Course with Joy, 20 March, 1770. Written by his Brother, the late William Cowper, Esq. of the Inner Temple, Author of the Task, &c. Faithfully transcribed from his original Manuscript by John Newton, Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, and St. Mary Woolchurch. 1802.

Tu supplicanti protinus admoves
Aurem, benignus; pro luchrimis mihi
Risum reducis, pro dolore
Lætitiamque alacremque plausum.

Buchanan, p. 30."

In his prefatory Advertisement, Mr. Newton says, "The

Editor's motives, which induce him to publish the following narrative, are chiefly two.

"1. That so striking a display of the power and mercy of God, may be more generally known, to the praise and glory of his grace, and the instruction and comfort of his people.

"2. The boasted spirit of refinement, the stress laid upon unassisted human reason, and the consequent scepticism to which they lead, and which so strongly mark the character of the present times, are not now confined merely to the dupes of infidelity; but many persons are under their influence, who would be much offended if we charged them with having renounced christianity. While no theory is admitted in natural history, which is not confirmed by actual and positive experiment, religion is the only thing to which a trial by this test is refused. The very name of vital experimental religion excites contempt and scorn, and provokes resentment. The doctrines of regeneration by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, and the necessity of his continual agency and influence to advance the holiness and comforts of those, in whose hearts he has already begun a work of grace, are not only exploded and contradicted by many who profess a regard for the Bible, and by some who have subscribed to the articles and liturgy of our established church, but they who avow an attachment to them, are upon that account, and that account alone, considered as hypocrites or visionaries, knaves or fools.

"The Editor fears, that many unstable persons are misled and perverted by the fine words and fair speeches of those who lie in wait to deceive. But he likewise hopes, that by the blessing of God, a candid perusal of what is here published, respecting the character, sentiments, and happy death of the late Reverend John Cowper, may convince them,—some of them at least, of their mistake, and break the snare in which they have been entangled."

A

SKETCH OF THE LIFE

OF THE LATE

REV. JOHN COWPER, A.M.

As soon as it had pleased God, after a long and sharp season of conviction, to visit me with the consolations of his grace, it became one of my chief concerns, that my relations might be made partakers of the same mercy. In the first letter I wrote to my brother, I took occasion to declare what God had done for my soul; and am not conscious, that from that period down to his last illness I wilfully neglected an opportunity of engaging him, if it were possible, in conversation of a spiritual kind. When I left St. Alban's, and went to visit him at Cambridge, my heart being full of the subject, I poured it out before him without reserve; and in all my subsequent dealings with him, so far as I was enabled, took care to show that I had received, not merely a set of notions, but a real impression of the truths of the gospel.

At first I found him ready enough to talk with me upon these subjects; sometimes he would dispute, but always without heat or animosity, and sometimes would endeavour to reconcile the difference of our sentiments, by supposing that, at the bottom, we were both of a mind, and meant the same thing.

He was a man of a most candid and ingenuous spirit; his temper remarkably sweet, and in his behaviour to me he had always manifested an uncommon

affection. His outward conduct, so far as it fell under my notice, or I could learn it by the report of others, was perfectly decent and unblamable. There was nothing vicious in any part of his practice; but, being of a studious, thoughtful turn, he placed his chief delight in the acquisition of learning, and made such acquisitions in it, that he had but few rivals in that a classical kind. He was critically skilled in the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages; was beginning to make himself master of Syriac, and perfectly understood the French and Italian, the latter of which he could speak fluently. These attainments, however, and many others in the literary way, he lived heartily to despise; not as useless when sanctified and employed in the service of God, but when sought after for their own sake, and with a view to the praise of men. Learned, however, as he was, he was easy and cheerful in his conversation, and entirely free from the stiffness which is generally contracted by men devoted to such pursuits.

Thus we spent about two years, conversing as occasion offered, (and we generally visited each other once or twice a week, as long as I continued at Huntingdon,) upon the leading truths of the gospel. By this time, however, he began to be more reserved; he would hear me patiently, but never reply; and this I found, upon his own confession afterward, was the effect of a resolution he had taken, in order to avoid disputes, and to secure the continuance of that peace which had always subsisted between us. When our family removed to Olney, our intercourse became less frequent. We exchanged an annual visit, and, when-

ever he came amongst us, he observed the same conduct, conforming to all our customs, attending family worship with us, and heard the preaching, received civilly whatever passed in conversation upon the subject, but adhered strictly to the rule he had prescribed to himself, never remarking upon or objecting to any thing he heard or saw. This, through the goodness of his natural temper, he was enabled to carry so far, that, though some things unavoidably happened, which we feared would give him offence, he never took any; for it was not possible to offer him the pulpit; nor when Mr. Newton was with us once at the time of family prayer, could we ask my brother to officiate, though being himself a minister, and one of our own family for the time, the office seemed naturally to fall into his hands.

In September, 1769, I learned by letters from Cambridge, that he was dangerously ill. I set out for that place the day after I received them, and found him as ill as I expected. He had taken cold on his return from a journey into Wales; and, lest he should be laid up at a distance from home, had pushed forward as fast as he could from Bath with a fever upon him. Soon after his arrival at Cambridge, he discharged, unknown to himself, such a prodigious quantity of blood, that the physician ascribed it only to the strength of his constitution that he was still alive; and assured me, that, if the discharge should be repeated, he must inevitably die upon the spot. In this state of imminent danger, he seemed to have no more concern about his spiritual interests than when in perfect health. His couch was strewed with vo-

lumes of plays, to which he had frequent recourse for amusement. I learned indeed afterwards, that even at this time the thoughts of God and eternity would often force themselves upon his mind; but not apprehending his life to be in danger, and trusting in the morality of his past conduct, he found it no difficult matter to thrust them out again.

As it pleased God that he had no relapse, he presently began to recover strength, and in ten days' time I left him so far restored, that he could ride many miles without fatigue, and had every symptom of returning health. It is probable, however, that, though his recovery seemed perfect, this illness was the means which God had appointed to bring down his strength in the midst of his journey, and to hasten on the malady which proved his last.

On the 16th of February, 1770, I was again summoned to attend him, by letters which represented him as so ill, that the physician entertained but little hopes of his recovery. I found him afflicted with the asthma and dropsy, supposed to be the effect of an imposthume in his liver. He was, however, cheerful when I first arrived, expressed great joy at seeing me, thought himself much better than he had been, and seemed to flatter himself with hopes that he should be well again. My situation at this time was truly distressful. I learned from the physician, that, in this instance as in the last, he was in much greater danger than he suspected. He did not seem to lay his illness at all to heart, nor could I find by his conversation that he had one serious thought. As often as a suitable occasion offered, when we were free from

company and interruption, I endeavoured to give a spiritual turn to the discourse; and the day after my arrival, asked his permission to pray with him, to which he readily consented. I renewed my attempts in this way as often as I could, though without any apparent success: still he seemed as careless and unconcerned as ever; yet I could not but consider his willingness in this instance as a token for good, and observed with pleasure, that though at other times he discovered no mark of seriousness, yet when I spoke to him of the Lord's dealings with myself, he received what I said with affection, would press my hand, and look kindly at me, and seemed to love me the better for it.

On the 21st of the same month he had a violent fit of the asthma, which seized him when he rose, about an hour before noon, and lasted all the day. His agony was dreadful. Having never seen any person afflicted in the same way, I could not help fearing that he would be suffocated; nor was the physician himself without fears of the same kind. This day the Lord was very present with me, and enabled me, as I sat by the poor sufferer's side, to wrestle for a blessing upon him. I observed to him, that though it had pleased God to visit him with great afflictions, yet mercy was mingled with the dispensation. I said, "You have many friends, who love you, and are willing to do all they can to serve you; and so perhaps have others in the like circumstances; but it is not the lot of every sick man, how much soever he may be beloved, to have a friend that can pray for him." He replied, "That is true, and I hope God will have

mercy upon me." His love for me from this time became very remarkable; there was a tenderness in it more than was merely natural; and he generally expressed it by calling for blessings upon me in the most affectionate terms, and with a look and manner not to be described.

At night, when he was quite worn out with the fatigue of labouring for breath, and could get no rest, his asthma still continuing, he turned to me, and said, with a melancholy air, "Brother, I seem to be marked out for misery; you know some people are so." That moment I felt my heart enlarged, and such a persuasion of the love of God towards him was wrought in my soul, that I replied with confidence, and as if I had authority given me to say it, "But that is not your case; you are marked out for mercy."

Through the whole of this most painful dispensation, he was blest with a degree of patience and resignation to the will of God not always seen in the behaviour of established Christians under sufferings so great as his. I never heard a murmuring word escape him; on the contrary, he would often say, when his pains were most acute, "I only wish it may please God to enable me to suffer without complaining; I have no right to complain." Once he said, with a loud voice, "Let thy rod and thy staff support and comfort me: and, O that it were with me as in times past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my tabernacle!" One evening, when I had been expressing my hope that the Lord would show him mercy, he replied: "I hope he will; I am sure I pretend to nothing." Many times he spoke of himself in terms of the greatest self-

abasement, which I cannot now particularly remember. I thought I could discern, in these expressions, the glimpses of approaching day; and have no doubt at present but that the Spirit of God was gradually preparing him, in a way of true humiliation, for that bright display of gospel grace which he was soon after pleased to afford him[19].

On Saturday, the 10th of March, about three in the afternoon, he suddenly burst into tears, and said with a loud cry, "O forsake me not!" I went to his bed-side, when he grasped my hand, and presently, by his eyes and countenance, I found that he was in prayer. Then turning to me he said, "O, brother, I am full of what I could say to you." The nurse asked him if he would have any hartshorn or lavender. He replied, "None of these things will serve my purpose." I said, "But I know what would, my dear, don't I?" He answered, "You do, brother."

Having continued some time silent, he said, "Behold I create new heavens and a new earth"—then after a pause, "Aye, and he is able to do it too."

I left him for about an hour, fearing lest he should fatigue himself with talking, and because my surprise and joy were so great, that I could hardly bear them. When I returned, he threw his arms about my neck, and leaning his head against mine, he said—"Brother, if I live, you and I shall be more like one another than we have been. But, whether I live or live not, all is well, and will be so; I know it will; I

[19] There is a beautiful illustration of this sudden and happy change in Mr. Cowper's poem entitled *Hope*.

"As when a felon whom his country's laws," &c.

have felt that which I never felt before, and am sure that God has visited me with this sickness, to teach me what I was too proud to learn in health. I never had satisfaction till now. The doctrines I had been used to, referred me to MYSELF for the foundation of my hopes, and there I could find nothing to rest upon. The sheet anchor of the soul was wanting. I thought you wrong, yet wished to believe as you did. I found myself unable to believe, yet always thought that I should one day be brought to do so. You suffered more than I have done before you believed these truths; but our sufferings, though different in their kind and measure, were directed to the same end. I hope he has taught me that which he teaches none but his own. I hope so. These things were foolishness to me once, but now I have a firm foundation, and am satisfied."

In the evening, when I went to bid him good night, he looked steadfastly in my face, and, with great solemnity in his air and manner, taking me by the hand, resumed the discourse in these very words. "As empty, and yet full; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things;—I see the rock upon which I once split, and I see the rock of my salvation. I have peace in myself; and, if I live, I hope it will be that I may be made a messenger of peace to others. I have learned *that* in a moment which I could not have learned by reading many books for many years. I have often studied these points, and studied them with great attention, but was blinded by prejudice; and, unless He who alone is worthy to unloose the seals, had opened the book to me, I had been blinded

still. Now they appear so plain, that, though I am convinced no comment could ever have made me understand them, I wonder I did not see them before. Yet great as my doubts and difficulties were, they have only served to pave the way; and, being solved, they make it plainer. The light I have received comes late: but it is a comfort to me that I never made the gospel-truths a subject of ridicule. Though I dissented from the persuasion and the ways of God's people, I ever thought them respectable, and therefore not proper to be made a jest of. The evil I suffer is the consequence of my descent from the corrupt original stock, and of my own personal transgressions; the good I enjoy comes to me as the overflowing of His bounty; but the crown of all his mercies is this, that he has given me a Saviour, and not only the Saviour of mankind, brother, but *my* Saviour."

"I should delight to see the people at Olney, but am not worthy to appear amongst them." He wept at speaking these words, and repeated them with emphasis, "I should rejoice in an hour's conversation with Mr. Newton, and, if I live, shall have much discourse with him upon these subjects, but am so weak in body, that at present I could not bear it."

At the same time he gave me to understand, that he had been five years inquiring after the truth, that is, from the time of my first visit to him after I left St. Alban's; and that, from the very day of his ordination, which was ten years ago, he had been dissatisfied with his own views of the gospel, and sensible of their defect and obscurity; that he had always had a sense of the importance of the ministerial charge, and

had used to consider himself accountable for his doctrine no less than his practice; that he could appeal to the Lord for his sincerity in all that time, and had never wilfully erred, but always been desirous of coming to the knowledge of the truth. He added, that the moment when he sent forth that cry[20], was the moment when light was darted into his soul; that he had thought much about these things in the course of his illness, but never till that instant was able to understand them.

It was remarkable, that, from the very instant when he was first enlightened, he was also wonderfully strengthened in body, so that from the 10th to the 14th of March we all entertained hopes of his recovery. He was himself very sanguine in his expectations of it, but frequently said, that his desire of recovery extended no farther than his hope of usefulness; adding, "Unless I may live to be an instrument of good to others, it were better for me to die now."

As his assurance was clear and unshaken, so he was very sensible of the goodness of the Lord to him in that respect. On the day when his eyes were opened, he turned to me, and in a low voice said, "What a mercy it is to a man in my condition to *know* his acceptance! I am completely satisfied of mine." On another occasion, speaking to the same purpose, he said, "This bed would be a bed of misery, and it is so:—but it is likewise a bed of joy and a bed of discipline. Was I to die this night, I know I should be happy. This assurance I hope is quite consistent with the word of God. It is built upon a sense of my own

[20] On the 10th of March, *vide supra*, p. 227.

utter insufficiency, and the all-sufficiency of Christ." At the same time, he said, " Brother, I have been building my glory upon a sandy foundation; I have laboured night and day to perfect myself in things of no profit; I have sacrificed my health to these pursuits, and am now suffering the consequences of my mispent labour. But how contemptible do the writers I once highly valued now appear to me! ' Yea, doubtless, I count all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.' I must now go to a new school. I have many things to learn. I succeeded in my former pursuits. I wanted to be highly applauded; and I was so. I was flattered up to the height of my wishes: now, I must learn a new lesson."

On the evening of the thirteenth he said, " What comfort have I in this bed, miserable as I seem to be! Brother, I love to look at you. I see now, who was right, and who was mistaken. But it seems wonderful, that such a dispensation should be necessary to enforce what seems so very plain. I wish myself at Olney; you have a good river there, better than all the rivers of Damascus. What a scene is passing before me! Ideas upon these subjects crowd upon me faster than I can give them utterance. How plain do many texts appear, to which, after consulting all the commentators, I could hardly affix a meaning. Now I have their true meaning without any comment at all. There is but one key to the New Testament; there is but one interpreter. I cannot describe to you, nor shall ever be able to describe, what I felt in the moment when it was given to me. May I make a good use of

it! How I shudder when I think of the danger I have just escaped! I had made up my mind upon these subjects, and was determined to hazard all upon the justness of my own opinions."

Speaking of his illness, he said he had been followed night and day, from the very beginning of it, with this text, *I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord.* This notice was fulfilled to him, though not in such a sense as my desires of his recovery prompted me to put upon it.

His remarkable amendment soon appeared to be no more than a present supply of strength and spirits, that he might be able to speak of the better life which God had given him, which was no sooner done than he relapsed as suddenly as he had revived. About this time he formed the purpose of receiving the sacrament, induced to it principally by a desire of setting his seal to the truth, in presence of those who were strangers to the change which had taken place in his sentiments. It must have been administered to him by the master of the college, to whom he designed to have made this short declaration: "If I die, I die in the belief of the doctrines of the reformation, and of the church of England as it was at the time of the reformation." But his strength declining apace, and his pains becoming more severe, he could never find a proper opportunity of doing it. His experience was rather peace than joy,—if a distinction may be made between joy and that heart-felt peace which he often spoke of in the most comfortable terms, and which he expressed by a heavenly smile upon his countenance under the bitterest bodily distress. His words upon

this subject once were these—" How wonderful is it, that God should look upon man, especially that he should look upon *me!* Yet he sees me, and takes notice of all that I suffer. I see him too: he is present before me, and I hear him say, Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. xi. 28. On the fourteenth, in the afternoon, I perceived that the strength and spirits which had been afforded him were suddenly withdrawn, so that by the next day his mind became weak, and his speech roving and faltering. But still, at intervals, he was enabled to speak of divine things with great force and clearness. On the evening of the fifteenth he said, " There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. That text has been sadly misunderstood by me, as well as by others. Where is that just person to be found? Alas, what must have become of me, if I had died this day sennight? What should I have had to plead? My own righteousness? *That* would have been of great service to me, to be sure! Well, whither next? Why to the mountains to fall upon us, and to the hills to cover us! I am not duly thankful for the mercy I have received. Perhaps I may ascribe some part of my insensibility to my great weakness of body. I hope, at least, that, if I was better in health, it would be better with me in these respects also."

The next day, perceiving that his understanding began to suffer by the extreme weakness of his body, he said, " I have been vain of my understanding and of my acquirements in this place; and now God has

made me little better than an idiot, as much as to say, 'Now be proud if you can.' Well, while I have any senses left, my thoughts will be poured out in the praise of God. I have an interest in Christ, in his blood and sufferings, and my sins are forgiven me. Have I not cause to praise him? When my understanding fails me quite, as I think it will soon, then He will pity my weakness."

Though the Lord intended that his warfare should be short, yet a warfare he was to have, and to be exposed to a measure of conflict with his own corruptions. His pain being extreme, his powers of recollection much impaired, and the Comforter withholding for a season his sensible support, he was betrayed into a fretfulness and impatience of spirit which had never been permitted to show itself before. This appearance alarmed me; and, having an opportunity afforded me by every body's absence, I said to him, "You were happier last Saturday than you are to-day. Are you entirely destitute of the consolations you then spoke of? And do you not sometimes feel comfort flowing into your heart from a sense of your acceptance with God?" He replied, "Sometimes I do, but sometimes I am left to desperation." The same day in the evening, he said, "Brother, I believe you are often uneasy, lest what lately passed should come to nothing." I replied by asking him, whether, when he found his patience and his temper fail, he endeavoured to pray for power against his corruptions? He answered, "Yes, a thousand times in a day. But I see myself odiously vile and wicked. If I die in this illness, I beg you will place no other inscription over me than

such as may just mention my name, and the parish where I was minister; for that I ever had a being, and what sort of a being I had, cannot be too soon forgot. I was just beginning to be a deist, and had long desired to be so; and I will own to you, what I never confessed before, that my function and the duties of it were a weariness to me which I could not bear. Yet, wretched creature and beast as I was, I was esteemed religious, though I lived without God in the world." About this time, I reminded him of the account of Janeway which he once read at my desire. He said he had laughed at it in his own mind, and accounted it mere madness and folly; "Yet, base as I am," said he, "I have no doubt now but God has accepted me also, and forgiven me all my sins."

I then asked him what he thought of my narrative? He replied, "I thought it strange, and ascribed much of it to the state which you had been in. When I came to visit you in London, and found you in that deep distress, I would have given the universe to have administered some comfort to you. You may remember that I tried every method of doing it. When I found that all my attempts were vain, I was shocked to the greatest degree. I began to consider your sufferings as a judgment upon you, and my inability to alleviate them as a judgment upon myself. When Mr. Madan came, he succeeded in a moment. This surprised me; but it does not surprise me now. He had the key to your heart, which I had not. That which filled me with disgust against my office as a minister was, the same ill success which attended me in my own parish. There I endeavoured to soothe the afflicted,

and to reform the unruly by warning and reproof; but all that I could say in either case was spoken to the wind, and attended with no effect."

There is that in the nature of salvation by grace, when it is truly and experimentally known, which prompts every person to think himself the most extraordinary instance of its power. Accordingly, my brother insisted upon the precedence in this respect, and upon comparing his case with mine, would by no means allow my deliverance to have been so wonderful as his own. He observed, that, " from the beginning, both his manner of life and his connexions had been such as had a natural tendency to blind his eyes, and to confirm and rivet his prejudices against the truth. Blameless in his outward conduct, and having no open immorality to charge himself with, his acquaintance had been with men of the same stamp, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised the doctrines of the cross. Such were all who from his earliest days he had been used to propose to himself as patterns for his imitation." Not to go further back, such was the clergyman under whom he received the first rudiments of his education; such was the schoolmaster under whom he was prepared for the university, and such were all the most admired characters there, with whom he was most ambitious of being connected. He lamented the dark and Christless condition of the place, where learning and morality were all in all, and where, if a man was possessed of these qualifications, he neither doubted himself, nor did any body else question the safety of his state. He concluded, therefore, that to show the fallacy of such appearances, and to root

out the prejudices which long familiarity with them had fastened upon his mind, required a more than ordinary exertion of divine power, and that the grace of God was more clearly manifested in such a work, than in the conversion of one like me, who had no outside righteousness to boast of, and who, if I was ignorant of the truth, was not, however, so desperately prejudiced against it."

His thoughts, I suppose, had been led to this subject, when, one afternoon, while I was writing by the fireside, he thus addressed himself to the nurse, who sat at his bolster, " Nurse, I have lived three and thirty years, and I will tell you how I have spent them. When I was a boy, they taught me Latin; and because I was the son of a gentleman, they taught me Greek. These I learned under a sort of private tutor; at the age of fourteen, or thereabouts, they sent me to a public school, where I learned more Latin and Greek, and, last of all, to this place, where I have been learning more Latin and Greek still. Now has not this been a blessed life, and much to the glory of God!" Then, directing his speech to me, he said, " Brother, I was going to say I was born in such a year, but I correct myself; I would rather say, in such a year I came into the world. You know when I was born."

As long as he expected to recover, the souls committed to his care were much upon his mind. One day, when none were present but myself, he prayed thus: " O Lord, thou art good, goodness is thy very essence, and thou art the fountain of wisdom. I am a poor worm, weak and foolish as a child. Thou hast intrusted many souls unto me; and I have not been

able to teach them, because I knew thee not myself. Grant me ability, O Lord, for I can do nothing without thee, and give me grace to be faithful."

In a time of severe and continual pain he smiled in my face, and said, "Brother, I am as happy as a king." And the day before he died, when I asked him what sort of a night he had had, he replied, "A sad night, not a wink of sleep." I said, "Perhaps though, your mind has been composed, and you have been enabled to pray?" "Yes," said he, "I have endeavoured to spend the hours in the thoughts of God and prayer; I have been much comforted, and all the comfort I got came to me in this way."

The next morning, I was called up to be witness of his last moments. I found him in a deep sleep, lying perfectly still, and seemingly free from pain. I stayed with him till they pressed me to quit the room, and in about five minutes after I had left him he died;—sooner indeed than I expected, though for some days there had been no hopes of his recovery. His death at that time was rather extraordinary; at least I thought it so; for, when I took leave of him the night before, he did not seem worse or weaker than he had been, and, for aught that appeared, might have lasted many days; but the Lord, in whose sight the death of his saints is precious, cut short his sufferings, and gave him a speedy and peaceful departure.

He died at seven in the morning, on the 20th of March, 1770.

CHAP. VIII.

COWPER AT OLNEY. RETURN OF HIS DISORDER. PARTIAL RECOVERY. MR. NEWTON REMOVES TO LONDON.

THE course of life into which Cowper had been led at Olney, tended to alienate him from the friends whom he loved best. He had dropped his correspondence with Lady Hesketh before she left England; and it seems as if that with Hill would have been dropped also, if Hill had not managed his pecuniary concerns, and clung to him with an affection which was not to be shaken from its hold. It was not till seven weeks after his brother's death that Cowper wrote to him[1], and then in reply to a letter which, as it touched upon matters of business, required an answer. The account which he acknowledged appears to have been of an uncomfortable kind; for after touching upon what his condition and his expectations might have been, Cowper says, "He to whom I have surrendered myself and all my concerns hath otherwise appointed; and let His will be done! He gives me much which he withholds from others; and if he was pleased to withhold all that makes an outward difference between me and the poor mendicant in the street, it would still become me to say, His will be done!"

In the course of the autumn, this true friend again invited him to London. The answer was not cold, but it was chilling:

[1] May 8, 1770.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE, Sept. 25, 1770.

I have not done conversing with terrestrial objects, though I should be happy were I able to hold more continual converse with a friend above the skies. He has my heart; but He allows a corner in it for all who show me kindness, and therefore one for you. The storm of sixty-three made a wreck of the friendships I had contracted in the course of many years, yours excepted, which has survived the tempest.

I thank you for your repeated invitation. Singular thanks are due to you for so *singular* an instance of your regard. I could not leave Olney, unless in a case of absolute necessity, without much inconvenience to myself and others.

W. C.

In the ensuing summer Hill wrote to tell him of his marriage. Cowper replied thus:

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE, Aug. 27, 1771.

I take a friend's share in all your concerns, so far as they come to my knowledge, and consequently did not receive the news of your marriage with indifference. I wish you and your bride all the happiness that belongs to the state; and the still greater felicity of that state which marriage is only a type of. All those connexions shall be dissolved; but there is an indissoluble bond between Christ and his church, the subject of derision to an unthinking world, but the glory and happiness of all his people.

I join with your mother and sisters in their joy upon the present occasion, and beg my affectionate respects to them, and to Mrs. Hill unknown.

Yours ever,

W. C.

This seems to have been followed by a silence of ten months, which was broken by an offer of assistance from Hill. The letters in which Cowper declines it, accepts it afterwards in the spirit in which it was sent, and declines a third invitation from his unwearied friend, show the state of his feelings during what has preposterously been called the happy portion of his life.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND, June 27, 1772.

I only write to return you thanks for your kind offer:—*Agnosco veteris vestigia flammæ.* But I will endeavour to go on without troubling you. Excuse an expression that dishonours your friendship; I should rather say, it would be a trouble to myself, and I know you will be generous enough to give me credit for the assertion. I had rather want many things,—any thing, indeed, that this world could afford me, than abuse the affection of a friend. I suppose you are sometimes troubled upon my account. But you need not. I have no doubt it will be seen, when my days are closed, that I served a Master who would not suffer me to want any thing that was good for me. He said to Jacob, "I will surely do thee good;" and this he said, not for his sake only, but for ours also, if we trust in Him. This thought relieves me from the

greatest part of the distress I should else suffer in my present circumstances, and enables me to sit down peacefully upon the wreck of my fortune.

Yours ever, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND, July 2, 1772.

My obligations to you sit easy upon me, because I am sure you confer them in the spirit of a friend. 'Tis pleasnt to some minds to confer obligations, and it is not unpleasant to others to be properly sensible of them. I hope I have this pleasure,—and can with a true sense of your kindness subscribe myself,

Yours,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Nov. 5, 1772.

Believe me, my dear friend, truly sensible of your invitation, though I do not accept it. My peace of mind is of so delicate a constitution, that the air of London will not agree with it. You have my prayers,—the only return I can make you, for your many acts of still-continued friendship.

If you should smile, or even laugh at my conclusion, and I were near enough to see it, I should not be angry, though I should be grieved. It is not long since I should have laughed at such a recompense myself. But glory be to the name of Jesus, those days are past, and, I trust, never to return!

I am yours, and Mrs. Hill's,

with much sincerity,

W. C.

These letters may have been written in a frame of "settled tranquillity and peace," but it was a tranquillity that had rendered his feelings of friendship torpid; and if this was "the only sunshine he ever enjoyed through the cloudy day of his afflicted life," it was not the sunshine of a serene sky.

The vicarage of Olney was in the Earl of Dartmouth's gift, a nobleman of whom Richardson is reported to have said, when asked if he knew an original answerable to his portrait of Sir Charles Grandison, that he might apply it to *him* if he were not a methodist [2]. The earl had given this living to Moses Brown, probably upon the recommendation of Hervey, the author of the Meditations, under whose patronage Brown, who had been a pen-cutter by trade, and a dramatist, had taken orders. Moses Brown was a poet, whose poems have not been fortunate enough to obtain a place in the General Collections, though better entitled to it than some which are found there. He published an edition of Izaak Walton's delightful book, being himself an angler, and, as Izaak would have added, a very honest man. His Piscatory Eclogues are better known by name than any of his other writings. But though thus given to poetry, and addicted to the recreation which seems to have most attractions for a meditative mind, he had not been negligent in his vocation as a fisher of men. Mr. Cecil says of him that he was "an evangelical minister, and a good man;" that "of course he had afforded wholesome instruction to the parishioners of Olney, and had been the instrument of a sound conversion in many of them;" that he had a

[2] Memoirs of Hannah More, vol. iii. p. 78.

numerous family, and met with considerable trials in it; that he too much resembled Eli in his indulgence of his children, and, that being under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, he had therefore accepted the chaplaincy of Morden College, Blackheath, while vicar of Olney. It was in consequence of Moses Brown having thus been compelled to become a non-resident incumbent, that Mr. Newton, in the year 1764, had been ordained upon the curacy of Olney.

In nominating him to this curacy, Lord Dartmouth provided, as he conscientiously sought to do, for the spiritual wants of the flock; but the provision for the temporal necessities of the pastor was poor indeed. "The curacy of Olney [3]," says Mr. Newton, "is thirty pounds, surplice fees about eight; subscriptions, &c. from the people have to me sometimes been forty pounds; but I question if it would be near so much to a new comer; perhaps no more than thirty pounds, if that." He took the curacy with an understanding that he might expect the living, if it should become vacant, and the vicar was at that time more than threescore years of age. But Moses Brown was one of those men who "be so strong that they come to fourscore," and the curate of Olney would have had little indeed for the poor and needy of his parishioners, and nothing for hospitality, if he had not introduced himself to Mr. Thornton, who was known as "the common patron of every useful and pious endeavour" by sending him the narrative of his own life, which he had concluded just before the curacy had been offered him, and published in the same year. Mr. Thornton

[3] March 9, 1777.

replied "in his usual manner," that is, by accompanying his letter with a valuable bank note; and some months after, he paid Mr. Newton a visit at Olney. A closer connexion being now formed between friends who employed their distinct talents in promoting the same benevolent cause, Mr. Thornton left a sum of money with Mr. Newton to be appropriated to the defraying his necessary expenses, and relieving the poor[4]. "Be hospitable," said Mr. Thornton, "and keep an open house for such as are worthy of an entertainment: help the poor and needy: I will statedly allow you two hundred pounds a year, and readily send whatever you have occasion to draw for more." Cowper was supplied also by this excellent man with a sum for charitable distribution, Mr. Thornton having been informed how little his means for relieving the distressed was commensurate with his will.

Cowper at this time read little: he had parted with a good collection of books when his affairs in London were settled; afterwards he often regretted this; but during the first year of his residence at Olney he seems to have had neither inclination nor leisure for reading. Mr. Unwin was settled upon a living in Essex; his sister had married a clergyman by name Powley, and removed to a great distance, in Yorkshire. Cowper, therefore, had no other society than that of Mrs. Unwin and Mr. Newton; and he held no communication with his absent friends. He was not, however, without some intellectual employment; Mr. Newton having formed the intention of producing a volume of hymns persuaded him to engage in

[4] Cecil's Memoirs of Mr. Newton.

it; "a desire," he says, "of promoting the faith and comfort of sincere Christians, though the principal, was not the only motive to this undertaking. It was likewise intended as a monument to perpetuate the remembrance of an intimate and endeared friendship."

One of Cowper's biographers thinks it not improbable that Mr. Newton might have witnessed in his morbid tendency to melancholy, whereof he then discovered symptoms, some traces of the deep and extensive wound which his mind had received by his brother's death, though his efforts to conceal it were incessant[5]; and that for this reason "he wisely engaged him in a literary undertaking, congenial with his taste, suited to his admirable talents, and perhaps more adapted to alleviate his distress than any other that could have been selected." And Mr. Hayley[6] has been reprehended for representing it as a perilous employment, considering what Cowper's malady had been.

Yet if Cowper expressed his own state of mind in

[5] Taylor's Life of Cowper, p. 102.

[6] "It may be doubtful," he says, "if the intense zeal with which Cowper embarked in this fascinating pursuit, had not a dangerous tendency to undermine his very delicate health. Such an apprehension naturally arises from a recollection of what medical writers of great ability have said on the awful subject of mental derangement. Whenever the slightest tendency to that misfortune appears, it seems expedient to guard a tender spirit from the attractions of Piety herself. So fearfully and wonderfully are we made, that man in all conditions ought perhaps to pray that he never may be led to think of his Creator, and of his Redeemer, either too lightly or too intensely; since human misery is often seen to arise equally from an utter neglect of all spiritual concerns, and from a wild extravagance of devotion."

these hymns, (and who can doubt that they were written with no simulated feeling, and those with most feeling which are most passionate?) Hayley has drawn the right conclusion from the fact.

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill[7].

Again, but in a strain that denoted a more fearful state:

My former hopes are fled,
My terror now begins:
I feel, alas! that I am dead
In trespasses and sins.

Ah, whither shall I fly!
I hear the thunder roar,
The law proclaims destruction nigh,
And vengeance at the door[8]!

And in another, which is entitled The Contrite Heart:

The Lord will happiness divine
On contrite hearts bestow:
Then tell me, gracious God, is mine
A contrite heart or no?

I hear, but seem to hear in vain,
Insensible as steel:
If aught is felt, 'tis only pain
To find I cannot feel.

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[7] Olney Coll. Book i. Hymn 3.

[8] Ib. Book iii. Hymn 8.

I sometimes think myself inclin'd
To love thee if I could;
But often feel another mind,
Averse to all that's good.

My best desires are faint and few,
I fain would strive for more;
But when I cry, "My strength renew,"
Seem weaker than before.

Thy saints are comforted, I know,
And love thy house of prayer;
I therefore go where others go,
But find no comfort there.

O make this heart rejoice or ache!
Decide this doubt for me;
And if it be not broken, break;
And heal it, if it be [9]!

It is true that expressions of hope follow the two former passages which have been here adduced, and that in other parts there is a tone of cheerful devotion. In his Welcome to the Table he says,

If guilt and sin afford a plea,
And may obtain a place,
Surely the Lord will welcome me,
And I shall see his face [10].

And his hymn of Jehovah Jesus concludes with the triumphant ejaculation,

Salvation's sure, and must be mine [11].

In common cases these variations would have been nothing more than what Mr. Newton daily was told

[9] Olney Coll. Book i. Hymn 64.
[10] Ib. Book ii. Hymn 53. [11] Ib. Hymn 38.

of by those persons who conversed with and consulted him as their spiritual director. But Cowper's was not a common case. His malady in its latter stage had been what is termed religious madness; and if his recovery was not supposed by himself, and by Mr. Newton also, to have been directly miraculous, it had been occasioned or accompanied by impressions, which, though favourable in their consequences at that crisis, indicated a frame of mind to which any extraordinary degree of devotional excitement must be dangerous. The ministerial offices in which his friend engaged him were highly so; and in composing the Olney Hymns he was led to brood over his own sensations in a way which rendered him peculiarly liable to be deluded by them. Whether any course of life could wholly have averted the recurrence of his disease may be doubtful; but that the course into which he was led accelerated it, there is the strongest reason to conclude.

Another cause, however, has been assigned for it. It has been said that he proposed marriage to Mrs. Unwin, that the proposal was accepted and the time fixed; that prudential considerations were then thought to preponderate against it, and that his mind was overthrown by the anxieties consequent upon such an engagement. This I believe to be utterly unfounded; for that no such engagement was either known or suspected by Mr. Newton I am enabled to assert, and who can suppose that it would have been concealed from him?

It is said that from the time of his brother's death, the increasing gloom which pressed upon his spirits, gave

but too much ground for the most painful apprehensions. But Dr. Cotton was not consulted till it was too late. In January, 1773, it had become a case of decided insanity. He was then unwilling even to enter Mr. Newton's door; but having one day been prevailed upon to visit him and remain one night, there he suddenly determined to stay. This was in March, and it appears that the case was not thought to require Dr. Cotton's advice till he had remained there five months, when Mr. Newton wrote thus to Mr. Thornton[12]: "I was at St. Alban's on Monday, to consult Dr. Cotton concerning Mr. Cowper. He desired that he might, if possible, be bled; and that the apothecary would give him an accurate account of the state of his blood, and what other observations he can make. He has been bled accordingly, and I hope we shall be able to give him every information which may be needful by to-morrow's post; and we shall then expect soon to receive his judgement and advice. From what I told him, he seemed to think it a difficult case. It may be so according to medical rules; but I still hope that the Great Physician will cure him, either by giving a blessing to means, or immediately by His own hand. I know not how to indulge a fear that the Lord, who has hitherto done such great things for him, and made him such a bright example of grace and submission, will suffer him to be always overwhelmed with this cloud; or refuse to give an answer to the many prayers which are put up for him."

About a fortnight afterwards, Mr. Newton says,

[12] Aug. 17, 1773.

"Mr. Cowper has taken Dr. Cotton's medicines about twelve days. They agree well with him; he eats better and sleeps no worse. He seems better in some respects; has employed himself a little of late in his favourite amusement, gardening, and has pruned several of our fruit trees, which I think he could not possibly have done when you were here. But the distress of his mind seems but little, if at all, abated. It gives me great satisfaction that he is under a course of medicine; and I am still in good spirits about his recovery[13]." The next communication says, "there has been little or no alteration in Mr. Cowper since my last. But the medicine evidently agrees with him. He says but little, but goes on in pruning our trees; and we are glad to find him capable of taking any amusement, and hope for the rest in the Lord's good time[14]."

After another interval of three weeks, Mr. Newton says[15], "Dr. Cotton's medicine has greatly strengthened his body; but the repeated use seemed at length to have an inconvenient effect upon his spirits. He said they made him worse, and for several days when the hour of taking them returned, it put him in an agony. Upon his earnest and urgent entreaties, he has left them off for a season, and has been better since,—I mean more quiet and composed. We have evident proof that the Lord is with him, supporting him, and answering prayer in his behalf: but deliverance is not yet come."

Up to this time Cowper, though he suffered greatly in mind, had not been "troubled with thoughts" of suicide; and that Mr. Newton considered a great

[13] Sept. 2, 1773. [14] Sept. 9. [15] Sept. 29.

mercy; but a fearful change in this respect then took place, and at a time when both Mr. and Mrs. Newton were in a distant part of the country[16]. The following extracts show the state of his mind. Mr. Newton says, "I wish I could inform you that I found dear Mr. Cowper much better when I returned; but his deliverance is yet to come; though in his case likewise there are such evident proofs of the Lord's care and goodness as encourage us still to hope for a happy issue[17]." The next week's letter says, "Dear Mr. Cowper has been more restless and impatient than formerly. I believe the medicines he took, though they seemed to agree with his health, rather inflamed his complaint. I was with Dr. Cotton again on Monday, who approved of our having discontinued them. I thank God those disagreeable appearances have gone off, and he is now quiet and gentle again, though his distress is very great[18]. After an interval of some six weeks, and another absence from Olney, his friend writes, "Mr. Cowper is no worse than when I left him, nor can I say that he is much better. Sometimes the Lord visits him in his sleep, so that his dreams are gracious and comfortable, and his heart drawn forth in prayer; but when he awakes his distress returns[19]." This is a remarkable passage, as it seems to show that when his madness was at the height, the mind recovered its

[16] "After what happened to dear Mr. Cowper while we were in Warwickshire, we have made it a point not to be both from home long together, without an absolute necessity, while his distress continues." Subsequent extracts show that the change occurred in October, and that in that month Mr. Newton returned home.

[17] Oct. 16. [18] Oct. 23. [19] Dec. 2.

natural tone during sleep, and his dreams were sometimes sane.

In the ensuing March, "Mr. Cowper still in the depths. Sometimes I have hope that his deliverance is at hand; at others I am almost at a stand. Yet I seldom am shaken in my persuasion that the issue, in the Lord's time, will be glorious." Since the autumn his state had become more fearful, and had required a constant watchfulness on the part of his friends, which nothing but the most devoted attachment could have induced them to undertake, or enabled them to undergo. Mrs. Unwin was his unwearied attendant at this time, day and night, equally regardless of her own health, and of the uncharitable construction of censorious and malicious tongues. The character which his madness had assumed rendered this perpetual vigilance necessary. "In the beginning of his disorder," says Mr. Newton, "when he was more capable of conversing than he was sometimes afterwards, how often have I heard him adore and submit to the sovereignty of God, and declare, though in the most agonizing and inconceivable distress, he was so perfectly satisfied of the wisdom and rectitude of the Lord's appointments, that if he was sure of relieving himself only by stretching out his hand, he would not do it, unless he was equally sure it was agreeable to His will that he should do it. I hope I shall never have so striking a proof of the integrity of any other friend,—because I hope I never shall see any other in so dreadful a state of trial[20]."

In the new character which his delirium had as-

[20] May 26, 1774.

sumed, the same perfect spirit of submission was manifested. Mr. Newton says, "even that attempt he made in October was a proof of it; for it was solely owing to the power the enemy had of impressing upon his disturbed imagination that it was the will of God, he should, after the example of Abraham, perform an expensive act of obedience, and offer not a son, but himself[21]. This was the peculiar impression which fastened upon him at that time, and from which he never seems to have been perfectly relieved, even in his longest and best intervals. He believed that when the will of Heaven was made known to him, power to accomplish the act of obedience had at the same time been given; but having failed to use it, he had been sentenced to a state of desertion and perpetual misery, of a kind peculiar to himself. A persuasion that the opportunity had gone by, seems at this time to have withheld him from any second attempt; but such a persuasion afforded no security to his friends, and their anxiety and vigilance were unintermitted. He had sunk into a state of utter hopelessness, "an unalterable persuasion," says Mr. Greatheed, "that the Lord, after having renewed him in holiness, had doomed him to everlasting perdition. The doctrines in which he had been established directly opposed such a conclusion, and he remained still equally convinced of this *general* truth; but he supposed himself to be the only person that ever believed with the heart unto righteousness, and was notwithstanding excluded from salvation. In this state of mind, with a deplorable consistency, he ceased not only from attendance upon

[21] May 26, 1774.

public and domestic worship, but likewise from every attempt at private prayer; apprehending that for *him* to implore mercy, would be opposing the determinate counsel of God."

Meantime the inconvenience to Mr. Newton was sorely felt, though he performed every duty of friendship to the utmost. Writing to his benefactor, Mr. Thornton[22], he says, "though I receive no person but upon the principle you allow and encourage for the Lord's sake, and in the hope of usefulness, it gives me a little pain sometimes, that our expenses, which are chiefly enhanced by company, were so high, and especially this year, having Mr. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin with us. The charge upon their account is not so great as if Mrs. Unwin had no house of her own; yet it is considerable. But I do not see how it can be avoided. When he came to us, I had no thoughts of his staying more than one night; but he has been so attached to this house, that it would be impossible to hint at his leaving it without aggravating his distress. Now there is something in me, (I hope it is not pride), which makes me quite unwilling to receive any inmates upon the footing of boarders[23]."

In a subsequent letter he says, "Mr. Cowper's long stay at the vicarage in his present uncomfortable state, has been upon many accounts inconvenient and trying. His choice of being here was quite unexpected; and his continuance is unavoidable, unless he was to be removed by force. Mrs. Unwin has often tried to persuade him to return to their own house, but he cannot bear to hear of it. He sometimes begs, and

[22] 1774. The letter is without date. [23] May 2, 1774.

weeps, and pleads to stay with such earnestness that it must be submitted to. I make myself easy by reflecting that the Lord's hand is concerned; and I am hoping weekly for his deliverance. His health is better: he works almost incessantly in the garden, and while employed is tolerably easy; but as soon as he leaves off he is instantly swallowed up by the most gloomy apprehensions; though in every thing that does not concern his own peace, he is as sensible, and discovers as quick a judgement as ever. The Lord evidently sent him to Olney, where he has been a blessing to many, a great blessing to myself. The Lord has numbered the days in which I am appointed to wait upon him in this dark valley, and He has given us such a love to him both as a believer and as a friend, that I am not weary; but to be sure, his deliverance would be to me one of the greatest blessings my thoughts can conceive."

In the course of a fortnight after this letter was written, the first symptom of amendment was perceived. "Yesterday, as he was feeding the chickens," Mr. Newton says, "for he is always busy if he can get out of doors,—some little incident made him smile; I am pretty sure it was the first smile that has been seen upon his face for more than sixteen months. I hope the continuance of air and exercise will, by the Lord's blessing, gradually lighten the cloud which hangs upon his mind. I have no right to complain; my mercies are many and great, my trials comparatively few; yet surely this affair, taken in all its circumstances, has been such a heavy trial to me, that had not I seen the Lord's hand in it, and had not His

hand been with me likewise, I surely should have laboured to shake it off before now. But when it first began, I prayed the Lord that I might not be weary. Hitherto He has helped; and however dark the path may grow, so long as it appears to me to be the path of duty, I dare not decline it[24]."

The next letter announced that Mrs. Unwin had prevailed on Cowper to return to their own house. "She had often laboured at this point in vain, and I am persuaded," says Mr. Newton, "a few days sooner it would have been impracticable. But now the Lord, who saw the weight I had upon my mind, was pleased to overrule him to go. The day before he came hither, hardly any entreaty could have induced him to enter our doors; it was a sudden turn; his determination to stay when he was here was sudden, and equally sudden was his departure. When he had once consented he longed to be gone. A few days were necessary to prepare the house for their reception; but they left on last Monday morning. I think it was the Lord's doing,—one of the many proofs we have had in the course of this affliction, that with Him nothing is impossible. I can see much of His wisdom and goodness in sending him under my roof; and now I see His goodness in removing him. Upon the whole, I have not been weary of my cross. Besides the submission I owe to the Lord, I think I can hardly do or suffer too much for such a friend; yet sometimes my heart has been impatient and rebellious. But I see the Lord's time is the best. The rest must

[24] May 14.

be waited for, and I have hopes we shall not wait very long. He evidently grows better, though the main stress of his malady still continues. He has been hitherto almost exactly treading over again the dreary path he formerly trod at St. Alban's. Some weeks before his deliverance there, he began to recover his attention, which had long been absorbed and swallowed up in the depths of despair, so that he could amuse himself a little with other things. Into this state the Lord seems now to have brought him; so that, though he seems to think himself lost to hope, he can continually employ himself in gardening, and upon that subject will talk as freely as formerly, though he seldom notices other conversation; and we can perceive almost daily, that his attention to things about him increases. I really have a warm hope that his deliverance is approaching[25]."

A decisive symptom of amendment had previously shown itself. His mind, though possessed by its fatal delusion, had recovered in some degree its activity, and in some of his most melancholy moments he used to compose lines descriptive of his own unhappy state. Two of these lines were remembered by a young poet[26] of St. John's, who sometimes went from Cambridge to visit Mr. Newton while Cowper was residing

[25] May 26.

[26] Mr. Brian Bury Collins, "one of my own early friends," says Mr. Dyer, "who touched the true lyric strings; but leaving college, he abandoned poetry for pursuits which more interested him; and now both as to poetry and preaching,—*lingua silet*."—Hist. of Cambridge, vol. ii. p. 265.

with him; and Mr. George Dyer has preserved them in his History of Cambridge[27], with a poet's feeling; "not recollecting," he says, "that they are any where introduced, and conceiving them to be more descriptive of the circumstances of Mr. Cowper's situation, than any with which we have met in his writings."

Cæsus amor meus est, et nostro crimine: cujus,
Ah! cujus posthinc potero latitare sub alis?
My love is slain, and by my crime is slain,
Ah! now beneath whose wings shall I repose?
G. D.

The fatal impression remained fixed in his mind, while in other respects it gradually regained its natural tone. He was incapable of receiving pleasure either from company or books; but he continued to employ himself in gardening, and understanding his own case well enough to perceive that any thing which would engage his attention without fatiguing it, must be salutary, he amused himself with some leverets; they grew up under his care, and continued to interest him nearly twelve years, when the last survivor died quietly of mere old age. He has immortalized them in Latin and in English, in verse and in prose; they have been represented in prints, and cut on seals; and

[27] Supplement to the History of Cambridge, p. 111. I will not deny myself the pleasure of observing that this passage, which I had passed over without noting it, ten years ago, (not having then any particular interest in the subject,) was recently pointed out to me by Mr. Wordsworth, in the curious and characteristic work of our old friend;—a person, of whom if I were ever to think without kindness, or to speak without affection and respect, I should be ashamed of myself. He is now blind, and in his eighty-first year.

his account of them, which in all editions of his poems, is now appended to their epitaphs, contains more observations than had ever before been contributed toward the natural history of this inoffensive race. He found in them as much difference of temper and character as is observable in all domestic animals, and in men themselves; and this might have been expected. The most remarkable fact which he noticed is, that they were never infested by any vermin; but it should seem more probable that this should have been an accidental consequence of their mode of life, than that the species should be exempt from an annoyance, to which, as far as we know, all other animals are subject, not birds and beasts only, but fish, and even insects.

To one of these hares that had never seen a spaniel, Cowper introduced a spaniel that had never seen a hare; and because the one discovered no token of fear and the other no symptom of hostility, he inferred that there is no natural antipathy between dog and hare: a fallacious inference, for the dog in its wild, which is its natural state, is a beast of prey. One of them was happier in human society than when shut up with his natural companions. Cowper twice nursed this creature in sickness, and by constant care and trying him with a variety of herbs, restored him to perfect health. "No creature," he says, "could be more grateful than my patient after his recovery, a sentiment which he most significantly expressed by licking my hand, first the back of it, then the palm, then every finger separately, then between all the fingers, as if anxious to leave no part of it unsaluted; a ceremony which he never performed but once again, upon a similar occasion." It

is very remarkable that this peculiar expression of attachment should only have been shown twice, and each time for the same peculiar reason.

More than two years elapsed after his return to his own house, before he renewed the communication with any of his absent friends. The silence seems then to have broken by a letter from Mr. Hill, informing him of his uncle Ashley's recovery from a serious illness, and offering, as appears by the answer, to supply some of his wishes, as well as his wants. A gleam of cheerfulness appears in Cowper's reply.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR FRIEND, Nov. 12, 1776.

One to whom fish is so welcome as it is to me, can have no great occasion to distinguish the sorts. In general, therefore, whatever fish are likely to think a jaunt into the country agreeable, will be sure to find me ready to receive them; butts, plaice, flounder, or any other.

Having suffered so much by nervous fevers myself, I know how to congratulate Ashley upon his recovery. Other distempers only batter the walls; but *they* creep silently into the citadel, and put the garrison to the sword.

You perceive I have not made a squeamish use of your obliging offer. The remembrance of past years, and of the sentiments formerly exchanged in our evening walks, convinces me still that an unreserved acceptance of what is graciously offered, is the handsomest way of dealing with one of your character.

Believe me yours,

W. C.

As to the frequency, which you leave to my choice, too, you have no need to exceed the number of your former remittances.

After an interval of some five months, Cowper thanks his old friend[28] for "a turbot, a lobster, and Captain Brydone; a gentleman," he says, "who relates his travels so agreeably that he deserves always to travel with an agreeable companion." By this time Cowper's love of literature had revived. "I have been reading Gray's works," he says, "and think him the only poet since Shakespeare entitled to the character of sublime. Perhaps you will remember that I once had a different opinion of him. I was prejudiced. He did not belong to our Thursday society, and was an Eton man, which lowered him prodigiously in our esteem. I once thought Swift's letters the best that could be written; but I like Gray's better. His humour or his wit, or whatever it is to be called, is never ill-natured or offensive; and yet, I think, equally poignant with the Dean's."

Hill encouraged this renovation of his former taste for intellectual amusement, entered upon literary subjects in his next letter, and offered to send him the Abbé Raynal's History. Cowper replies[29], "We differ not much in our opinion of Mr. Gray. When I wrote last, I was in the middle of the book. His later Epistles, I think, are worth little, *as such*, but might be turned to excellent account by a young student of taste and judgement. As to Mr. West's Letters, I think I could easily bring your opinion of them to square with mine. They are elegant and sensible, but have nothing in

[28] April 20, 1777. [29] May 25, 1777.

them that is characteristic, or that discriminates them from the letters of any other young man of taste and learning. As to the book you mention, I am in doubt whether to read it or not. I should like the philosophical part of it; but the political, which, I suppose, is a detail of intrigues carried on by the Company and their servants, a history of rising and falling nabobs, I should have no appetite to at all. I will not, therefore, give you the trouble of sending it at present."

Hill then proposed to send him the South Sea Voyages, but Lord Dartmouth, who had recently[30] visited Olney, had furnished Cowper with both Cook and Forster's. "'Tis well," he said, "for the poor natives of those distant countries that our national expenses cannot be supplied by cargoes of yams and bananas. Curiosity, therefore, being once satisfied, they may possibly be permitted for the future to enjoy their riches of this kind in peace[31]." But he asked his friend, if he could procure them, to send him at his leisure, Baker on the Microscope, and Vincent Bourne's Poems.

[30] It was a visit of business,—of which Mr. Newton speaks thus, in one of his unpublished letters, June 14, 1777.—"I dined with Lord Dartmouth, Lord Verney, and about ten gentlemen of the county, at the Swan, on Monday, upon a committee to inspect and report the ruinous state of our bridge. We had such a sumptuous dinner as I suppose was never seen at Olney before. We had a man cook, and a bill of fare from London. Sixteen at table; the ordinary came to nine shillings, but I suppose a guinea a piece would not have defrayed the expense. The town makes good the rest; they made a point of accommodating my lords and gentlemen very handsomely. All was very decent and sociable, but nothing remarkable occurred, and I was well pleased when it was over."

[31] July 13, 1777.

So little had Cowper as yet recovered his inclination for letter-writing, that he to whom every trifling circumstance afterwards afforded subject for graceful or playful narrative, seems at this time not to have mentioned to his then only correspondent a fire which, if the wind, which when it broke out was northerly, right up the street, had not changed, seemed as if it must have destroyed almost half the town. Seven or eight houses were presently in flames; the wind then directed the fire backward to a few out-buildings, and thus providentially averted the destruction that was looked for, almost all the houses being thatched, and the season uncommonly dry. This event, in its incidental consequences, produced an effect upon Mr. Newton which in no slight degree influenced his subsequent life, and thereby influenced Cowper's. That part of the loss which had not been covered by insurance was estimated at 450*l.* and this fell wholly upon the poor, or upon those who were reduced by it to the poverty against which they had been struggling. It is to the credit of the neighbourhood that 230*l.* was immediately contributed toward their relief, at and about home. Lord Dartmouth sent 30*l.* "The plan was to pay twelve shillings in the pound upon buildings, and sixteen upon goods, and to make up the full loss to the poorer sufferers." Mr. Newton, from those sources of private beneficence which were always opened upon his application, promised 60*l.*; he obtained 200*l.* Such instances of benevolence," says Mr. Cecil[32], "with the constant assistance he afforded the poor by the help of Mr. Thornton, naturally led him to expect that he should have so much influence as to restrain gross

licentiousness on particular occasions: but to use his own expression, he had 'lived to bury the old crop, on which any dependence could be placed.'"

Mr. Newton, dwelling in his next sermon upon the good Providence which in the midst of judgement had remembered mercy, told the people that he believed prayer had contributed more to stopping the fire than water. "I hope," said he to Mr. Thornton[33], "it will not soon be forgotten by some: but alas, too many are hardened and daring; and were it not that there is a few of the Lord's people dispersed up and down the town, who sigh and mourn for the abominations that abound, I should expect the whole would soon be laid in ashes. The people of Sodom scorned Lot; but their safety wholly depended upon his residence among them. And so it probably was with Noah. But when Noah and Lot were gone, vengeance took place. The people of the world little think how much they owe their preservation to those whom they despise. Believers are indeed the salt of the places where they live. By their example and influence they give some check to the spreading corruption of morals, and by their prayers they prevail that wrath is not poured forth to the uttermost. This consideration encourages one to hope likewise on a national account. The Lord has a remnant in it, for the sake of which mercy shall be afforded, though apparently things seem ripening apace for destruction. When a nation is decaying, like an oak that casts its leaves, the Lord's people are like sap in the root,—the life and substance which give hope that the tree may revive again[34]."

[33] Nov. 1, 1777. [34] Isaiah, vi. 13.

A few months before[35], he had compared Olney to Jeremiah's two baskets of figs; one basket of good figs, very good; the other of evil figs, very evil, that could not be eaten. "Wickedness," said he, "is grown to a dreadful height; but the greater part of my serious people are precious humble souls, and well disposed to make a minister happy." He had now reason to know that the evil figs filled the far larger basket; for at the very time when he was exerting himself to the utmost in behalf of the sufferers by the fire, he had a most unexpected and mortifying proof of popular ingratitude and violence. The circumstances are related by him in a letter to Mr. Thornton[36].

"When I met the committee for the fire, I recommended, amongst other means of preventing fire in future, the discontinuance of a foolish custom, almost peculiar to this town, of illuminating their houses on the 5th of November, and likewise preventing bonfires and firing guns in the town. As most of the houses are thatched, I have been yearly apprehensive of mischief. There were about twenty-five persons present, as I thought, of all sorts and parties amongst us. My motion was approved of by every one, and I was desired to give notice of it at church, and I really understood it to be the general sense of the town. But when the day came, there was great opposition. Not only some of the worldly and wicked, but I am sorry to say, the Baptists in a body set themselves against it. Many put up candles who had not done so in former years; and some who had, doubled their number. This gave encouragement to the sons of Belial, and when night

[35] March 6, 1777. [35] Nov. 18, 1777.

came on there was much riot and confusion. A wild and lawless mob paraded the streets, breaking windows, and extorting money from one end of the town to the other. My house was expressly threatened. I committed it to the Lord, and seemed in my own mind determined to see what they would do. I still believe, that if they had come, and I had gone out to speak with them, I might have had so much influence with some of them at least, as to have saved my windows. But upon a friend's bringing word, about ten in the evening, that forty or fifty of them, full of fury and liquor, were just coming to beset us, Mrs. Newton was so terrified, and her head so much affected, as it always is upon any alarm, that I was forced to send an embassy and beg peace. A soft message, and a shilling to the captain of the mob, secured his protection, and we slept in safety. Alas, 'tell it not in Gath!' I am ashamed of the story, and have only mentioned it to you. We have some who sigh and mourn for the evils that abound amongst us, but for want of leading men and magistrates, things are come to such a pass, as is indeed a scandal to a place that has been so long favoured with the light of the Gospel. We dwell among lions and firebrands, with men whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongues a sharp sword[37]. And yet, through mercy, the worst of them, taken singly and sober, seem disposed to show me some respect; but in a body, and when influenced with drink, they are terrible creatures."

When Mr. Newton related this occurrence to his biographer, Mr. Cecil, he added, that he believed he

[37] Psalm lvii. 4.

should never have left Olney while he lived, had not so incorrigible a spirit prevailed in a parish which he had so long laboured to reform[38]. He removed to London about two years afterwards, when Mr. Thornton presented him to the rectory of the united parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Mary Woolchurch-Haw.

Before his departure he published the 'Olney Hymns,' by which Cowper may be said to have been first introduced to the public as a poet. After stating in his preface that the design had been undertaken partly in the hope that it might form a memorial of a true friendship, Mr. Newton says, "with this pleasing hope I entered upon my part, which would have been smaller than it is, and the book would have appeared much sooner, and in a very different form, if the wise, though mysterious Providence of God had not seen fit to cross my wishes. We had not proceeded far upon our proposed plan, before my dear friend was prevented, by a long and affecting indisposition, from affording me any farther assistance. My grief and disappointment were great: I hung my harp upon the willows, and for some time thought myself determined to proceed no farther without him. Yet my mind was afterwards led to resume the service. My progress in it, amidst a variety of other engagements, has been slow; yet, in a course of years, the Hymns amounted to a considerable

[38] Mr. Cecil says, "But I must remark here, that this is no extraordinary fact, nor at all unaccountable. The Gospel, we are informed, is not merely 'a savour of life unto life,' but also 'of death unto death.' Those whom it does not soften, it is often found to harden."

number; and my deference to the judgement and desires of others has at length overcome the reluctance I long felt to see them in print, while I had so few of my friend's hymns to insert in the collection. Though it is possible a good judge of composition might be able to distinguish those which are his, I have thought it proper to prevent a misapplication by subjoining the letter C to each of them."

The Olney Hymns, though they met with some opposition in a quarter where it was little expected, obtained a considerable sale. Mr. Thornton took a thousand copies for distribution; but Cowper's influence would never have extended beyond the sphere in which those hymns circulated, and would have been little there, if he himself had continued under the influence of Mr. Newton. Mr. Newton would not have thought of encouraging him to exercise his genius in any thing but devotional poetry; and he found it impossible to engage him again in that, because of the unhappy form which his hallucination had assumed. One whose intentions are so purely benevolent, and whose zeal so sincere, can hardly be induced to suspect that peradventure he may have been mistaken in his way of doing good, and that, with the best motives, he may have produced an injurious effect. Yet such a suspicion seems to have been almost forced upon him, by what he observed at Olney; and nothing can be more ingenuous than the manner in which he unbosoms himself to his friend and benefactor, Mr. Thornton.

"A young woman in this town is disordered in mind, so far as to be, I think, a proper subject for Bethlehem or St. Luke's. Her family is in the lowest

state of poverty. Her father is a wicked man; her mother, I hope, has some little sense of spiritual things; her aunt, who lives with them, is a very gracious woman, but very infirm, and I believe has not been more than ten times out of her house since I have been at Olney. They were in much distress before, but the girl's distraction has greatly heightened it; and as only the aunt belongs to this parish, I think, if I had not contributed something to their support, they must have nearly been starved. The mother has been with me this morning; they have been under this affliction several months, and the girl grows worse. They can get no rest at night, nor manage her by day, though she takes up their whole time. I should be very glad if she could be got into one of the hospitals, and therefore thought I would take the liberty of mentioning it to you. I hope the poor girl is not without some concern about her soul; and, indeed, I believe a concern of this kind was the beginning of her disorder. I believe my name is up about the country for preaching people mad; for whether it is owing to the sedentary life the women live here, poring over their pillows for ten or twelve hours every day, and breathing confined air in their crowded little rooms, or whatever may be the immediate cause, I suppose we have near a dozen, in different degrees disordered in their heads, and most of them I believe truly gracious people. This has been no small trial to me, and I have felt sometimes as I suppose David might feel when the Lord smote Uzza for touching the Ark. He was displeased; and I have found my spirit rising against what He sees fit to permit. But if He brings them through fire and water

safe to his kingdom, whatever they may suffer by the way, they are less to be pitied than the mad people of the world, who think themselves in their senses, and take occasion to scoff at the Gospel, as if it was only fit to drive people out of their senses. Perhaps the Lord permits these things, in judgement, that they who seek occasion for stumbling and cavilling may have what they want. I trust there is nothing in my preaching that tends to cast those down who ought to be comforted."

CHAP. IX.

COWPER AT OLNEY. FIRST VOLUME OF HIS POEMS. LADY AUSTEN.

HITHERTO Cowper had had no other society at Olney than that of Mr. Newton's visitants, and his occasional inmates,—chiefly young men from the university, who had determined upon taking what is called the evangelical line, and therefore placed themselves under him to finish their education. Next to the duties of his ministry, Mr. Newton had made it the business of his life to attend his afflicted friend[1]; and now before his departure, prevailing over the strong reluctance which Cowper still felt at seeing a stranger, he introduced to him the Reverend William Bull, a dissenting minister, who was settled in the adjacent town of Newport

[1] Dr. Johnson's Sketch of the Life of Cowper. They are Mr. Newton's own words, in a letter to Dr. Johnson, after Cowper's death.

Pagnell. Feelings of compassion induced Mr. Bull to consider it as "a duty to visit him once a fortnight[2];" he soon became attached to Cowper, and by his own amiable disposition, congenial taste, and cultivated understanding, gradually gained his cordial and confidential esteem.

The removal of one with whom he had lived twelve years in habits of daily intercourse, and of the most unreserved intimacy, was severely felt by Cowper. In a letter to Mrs. Newton[3], he says, "The vicarage-house became a melancholy object, as soon as Mr. Newton had left it; when you left it, it became more melancholy: now it is actually occupied by another family, I cannot even look at it without being shocked. As I walked in the garden this evening I saw the smoke issue from the study chimney, and said to myself, That used to be a sign that Mr. Newton was there; but it is so no longer. The walls of the house know nothing of the change that has taken place; the bolt of the chamber-door sounds just as it used to do; and when Mr. P—— goes upstairs, for aught I know, or ever shall know, the fall of his foot could hardly, perhaps, be distinguished from that of Mr. Newton. But Mr. Newton's foot will never be heard upon that staircase again. These reflections, and such as these, occurred to me upon the occasion; * * * * * *. If I were in a condition to leave Olney too, I certainly would not stay in it. It is no attachment to the place that binds me here, but an unfitness for every other. I lived in it once, but now I am buried in it, and have no business with the world on the outside of my se-

[2] Hayley, vol. i. p. 120. [3] March 4, 1780.

pulchre; my appearance would startle them, and theirs would be shocking to me.

"Such are my thoughts about the matter. Others are more deeply affected, and by more weighty considerations, having been many years the objects of a ministry which they had reason to account themselves happy in the possession of."

Some time before this separation, Cowper had been rendered somewhat uneasy concerning his circumstances, a letter from Mr. Hill[4] having given him reason to apprehend some defalcation in his scanty means. "I shall be glad," he says in his reply, "if you will let me know whether I am to understand by the sorrow you express, that any part of my former supplies is actually cut off, or whether they are only more tardy in coming in, than usual. It is useful even to the rich, to know, as nearly as may be, the exact amount of their income; but how much more so to a man of my small dimensions. If the former should be the case, I shall have less reason to be surprised, than I have to wonder at the continuance of them so long. Favours are favours indeed, when laid out upon so barren a soil, where the expense of sowing is never accompanied by the smallest hope of return. What pain there is in gratitude, I have often felt; but the pleasure of requiting an obligation has always been out of my reach."

A few months afterwards he was informed of Sir Thomas Hesketh's death. "Poor Sir Thomas," he says, "I knew that I had a place in his affections, and from his own information, many years ago, a place in his will; but little thought that after the lapse of so

[4] January 1, 1778.

many years I should still retain it. His remembrance of me, after so long a season of separation, has done me much honour, and leaves me the more reason to regret his decease[5]."

The death of Sir Thomas proved, in its eventual consequences, of the greatest importance to Cowper; but at the time, the elevation of his old associate Thurlow to the chancellorship appeared of much more to some of his sanguine friends, who measured the attachment of others towards him by their own. Mr. Unwin, with whom about this time he began to correspond, frequently advised him to recall himself to the recollection of one in whose power it now was to relieve him from all anxieties concerning his income, by performing a promise which was not the less binding because of the half-sportive, half-serious mood in which it had been made[6]. Cowper replied to this suggestion thus:

DEAR UNWIN, June 18, 1778.

I feel myself much obliged to you for your kind intimation, and have given the subject of it all my best attention, both before I received your letter and since. The result is, that I am persuaded it will be better not to write. I know the man and his disposition well; he is very liberal in his way of thinking, generous and discerning. He is well aware of the tricks that are played upon such occasions; and, after fifteen years interruption of all intercourse between us, would translate my letter into this language—pray remember the poor. This would disgust him, because he would think our former intimacy disgraced by such an oblique

[5] April 11, 1778. [6] Page 41.

application. He has not forgotten me; and if he had, there are those about him who cannot come into his presence without reminding him of me; and he is also perfectly acquainted with my circumstances. It would perhaps give him pleasure to surprise me with a benefit; and if he means me such a favour, I should disappoint him by asking it. Thus he dealt with my friend Mr. Hill, to whom by the way I introduced him, and to all my family connexions in town. He sent for him the week before last, and without any solicitation, freely gave him one of his secretaryships. I know not the income; but as Mr. Hill is in good circumstances and the gift was unasked, I dare say it is no trifle.

I repeat my thanks for your suggestion; you see a part of my reasons for thus conducting myself; if we were together, I could give you more.

Your's, affectionately,

W. C.

It is not easy, nor is it always possible, for men in power to serve one who is not in a situation to serve himself. There came a time when Thurlow might properly have solicited a pension for Cowper, and no doubt, could have obtained it; and that he neglected to do so, must ever be considered as some discredit to his memory. But at this time he had justified the opinion which Cowper entertained of him, and shown himself not unmindful of his old friends, by surprising Mr. Hill with an appointment. "This," said Cowper, "is just according to the character of the man. He will give grudgingly in answer to solicitation, but delights in

surprising those he esteems with his bounty." The increase of business which this brought with it, had the effect of shortening Hill's letters. "If I had had the horns of a snail," says his friend, "I should have drawn them in the moment I saw the reason of your epistolary brevity, because I felt it too. May your seven reams be multiplied into fourteen, till your letters become truly Lacedæmonian, and are reduced to a single syllable! Though I shall be a sufferer by the effect, I shall rejoice in the cause. You are naturally formed for business, and such a head as yours can never have too much of it. Though my predictions have been fulfilled in two instances, I do not plume myself much upon my sagacity; because it required but little to foresee that Thurlow would be Chancellor, and that you would have a crowded office."

At this time Cowper neither thought himself neglected by Thurlow, nor had any reason to think so. He wrote some stanzas on his promotion, and sent them to Hill: "I wrote them indeed," he says, "on purpose for you; for my subjects are not always such as I could hope would prove agreeable to you. My mind has always a melancholy cast, and is like some pools I have seen, which, though filled with a black and putrid water, will nevertheless, in a bright day, reflect the sunbeams from their surface[7]."

He strove against that "black and diseased melancholy," and sought to divert or mitigate it by healthful exercise of body and of mind. Cowper, indeed, when in a state of moral responsibility, seems to have beautifully exemplified that true practical philosophy, which

[7] Nov. 14, 1779.

makes the most of little pleasures and the best of every thing. He was now about to garden upon what was to him a greater scale; and having been made to feel the necessity of economizing in his amusements, called upon his friend Unwin to assist him in "a design to cheat the glazier[8]." "Government," said he, "has laid a tax upon glass, and he has trebled it. I want as much as will serve for a large frame, but am unwilling to pay an exorbitant price for it. I shall be obliged to you, therefore, if you will inquire at a glass manufacturer's how he sells his Newcastle glass, such as is used for frames and hothouses. If you will be so good as to send me this information, and at the same time the manufacturer's address, I will execute the rest of the business myself, without giving you any farther trouble." He did wisely in thus restricting his agent's power; the London tradesman proved not more reasonable than the Olney one, and Cowper, upon receiving his terms, replied[9], "If you please, you may give my service to Mr. James M—, glazier, and tell him that I have furnished myself with glass from Bedford for half the money."

Another commission followed[10]. "*Amico mio*, be pleased to buy me a glazier's diamond pencil. I have glazed the two frames designed to receive my pine plants. But I cannot mend the kitchen windows till, by the help of that implement, I can reduce the glass to its proper dimensions. If I were a plumber I should be a complete glazier, and possibly the happy time may come when I shall be seen

[8] May 26, 1779.
[9] July, 1779.
[10] To Mr. Unwin, Sept. 21, 1779.

trudging away to the neighbouring towns with a shelf of glass hanging at my back. If government should impose another tax upon that commodity, I hardly know a business in which a gentleman might more successfully employ himself. A Chinese, of ten times my fortune, would avail himself of such an opportunity without scruple; and why should not I, who want money as much as any mandarin in China? Rousseau would have been charmed to have seen me so occupied, and would have exclaimed with rapture, 'that he had found the Emilius, who (he supposed) had subsisted only in his own idea.' I would recommend it to you to follow my example. You will presently qualify yourself for the task, and may not only amuse yourself at home, but may even exercise your skill in mending the church windows; which, as it would save money to the parish, would conduce, together with your other ministerial accomplishments, to make you extremely popular in the place."

Touching upon the same subject to Mr. Newton[11], and comparing his own feelings with those of most other men, Cowper says, "At present, the difference between them and me is greatly to their advantage. I delight in baubles, and know them to be so; for rested in, and viewed without a reference to their Author, what is the Earth, what are the planets, what is the sun itself, but a bauble? Better for a man never to have seen them, or to see them with the eyes of a brute, stupid and unconscious of what he beholds, than not to be able to say, 'The Maker of all these wonders is my friend!' Their eyes have never been

[11] May 3, 1780.

opened, to see that they are trifles; mine have been, and will be till they are closed for ever. They think a fine estate, a large conservatory, a hothouse rich as a West Indian garden, things of consequence; visit them with pleasure, and muse upon them with ten times more. I am pleased with a frame of four lights, doubtful whether the few pines it contains will ever be worth a farthing; amuse myself with a greenhouse which Lord Bute's gardener could take upon his back and walk away with; and when I have paid it the accustomed visit, and watered it and given it air, I say to myself—'This is not mine; 'tis a plaything lent me for the present; I must leave it soon.'"

With the love of reading, the love of writing also had returned, and Cowper amused himself with versifying upon various occasions; but this gave place for a while to a passion for drawing. "I deal much in ink," he says, "but not such ink as is employed by poets and writers of essays. Mine is a harmless fluid, and guilty of no deceptions but such as may prevail without the least injury to the person imposed on. I draw mountains, valleys, woods, and streams, and ducks and dabchicks. I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them, and her praise and my praise, put together, are fame enough for me."

Some employment, in the way of his old profession, his neighbours occasionally gave him,—in kindness to themselves. "I know less of the law," he says to Mr. Hill[12], "than a country attorney, yet sometimes I think I have almost as much business. My former connexion with the profession has got wind; and though

[12] May 6, 1780.

I earnestly profess and protest, and proclaim it abroad, that I know nothing of the matter, they cannot be persuaded to believe that a head once indued with a legal periwig can ever be deficient in those natural endowments it is supposed to cover. I have had the good fortune[13] to be once or twice in the right, which, added to the cheapness of a gratuitous counsel, has advanced my credit to a degree I never expected to attain in the capacity of a lawyer. Indeed, if two of the wisest in the science of jurisprudence may give opposite opinions on the same point, which does not unfrequently happen, it seems to be a matter of indifference whether a man answers by rule or at a venture. He that stumbles upon the right side of the question, is just as useful to his client as he that arrives at the same end by regular approaches, and is conducted to the mark he aims at by the greatest authorities."

The "Report of an adjudged Case, not to be found in any of the Books," was written about this time. "Happy," said he, when he transcribed it for his friend Hill, "is the man who knows just so much of the law as to make himself a little merry now and then with the solemnity of judicial proceedings." In a darker mood he said to Mr. Newton[14], "I wonder that a

[13] Mr. Newton had some reliance upon his skill. "I have drawn up a clause," he says, "to be inserted in Mrs. ——'s will, which my dear friend Mr. Cowper has looked over and approves, and says it will pass very well as to the forms of law; for in what does not immediately concern himself, his judgement is as clear as ever." 14 Jan. 1775.

This was at the commencement of his recovery.

[14] July 12, 1780.

sportive thought should ever knock at the door of my intellects, and still more that it should gain admittance. It is as if harlequin should intrude himself into the gloomy chamber where a corpse is deposited in state. His antic gesticulations would be unseasonable at any rate, but more especially so if they should distort the features of the mournful attendants with laughter. But the mind, long wearied with the sameness of a dull dreary prospect, will gladly fix its eyes on any thing that may make a little variety in its contemplations, though it was but a kitten playing with her tail." "Cowper's taste," says Sir Egerton Brydges[15], "lay in a smiling, colloquial, good-natured humour; his melancholy was a black and diseased melancholy, not a grave and rich contemplativeness." It was black because it was morbid; but it assumed a better character in his writings, when a fortunate direction was given it.

Mrs. Unwin was the first who excited him to undertake something of greater pith and moment than he had ever before produced. She urged him to write a poem of considerable length, and as moral satire was equally congenial to his taste and accordant to his views, she suggested as a theme the Progress of Error. Mr. Newton was the only person to whom his intention was communicated while he was engaged upon it; and notwithstanding the tone and purport of his poetry, he seems to have thought that Mr. Newton might disapprove it. "Don't be alarmed," he says to him[16]; "I ride Pegasus with a curb. He will never run away

[15] Recollections of Foreign Travel, vol. i. p. 242.

[16] Dec. 21, 1780.

with me again. I have even convinced Mrs. Unwin that I can manage him, and make him stop when I please." In the same letter, he says, "If human nature may be compared to a piece of tapestry, (and why not?) then human nature, as it subsists in me, though it is sadly faded on the right side, retains all its colour on the wrong. I am pleased with commendation, and though not passionately desirous of indiscriminate praise, or what is generally called popularity, yet when a judicious friend claps me on the back, I own I find it an encouragement. At this season of the year, and in this gloomy uncomfortable climate, it is no easy matter for the owner of a mind like mine, to divert it from sad subjects, and fix it upon such as may administer to its amusement. Poetry, above all things, is useful to me in this respect. While I am held in pursuit of pretty images, or a pretty way of expressing them, I forget every thing that is irksome, and, like a boy that plays truant, determine to avail myself of the present opportunity to be amused, and to put by the disagreeable recollection that I must, after all, go home and be whipt again."

The Progress of Error met with Mr. Newton's approbation, and it was speedily followed by three other poems of the same kind, Truth, Table Talk, and Expostulation. So eagerly did he enter into this undertaking, and pursue it, that the first of these poems sprung up in the month of December, and the last in the month of March following.

Upon sending Table Talk to Mr. Newton, he said to him, "It is a medley of many things, some that may be useful, and some that, for aught I know, may

be very diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise procures me, to drop a word in favour of religion. In short, there is some froth, and here and there a bit of sweet-meat, which seems to entitle it justly to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a trifle. I did not choose to be more facetious, lest I should consult the taste of my readers at the expense of my own approbation; nor more serious than I have been, lest I should forfeit theirs. A poet in my circumstances has a difficult part to act: one minute obliged to bridle his humour, if he has any, and the next to clap a spur to the sides of it: now ready to weep from a sense of the importance of his subject, and on a sudden constrained to laugh, lest his gravity should be mistaken for dulness. If this be not violent exercise for the mind, I know not what is; and if any man doubt it, let him try. Whether all this management and contrivance be necessary, I do not know, but am inclined to suspect that if my Muse was to go forth clad in Quaker colour, without one bit of riband to enliven her appearance, she might walk from one end of London to the other, as little noticed as if she were one of the sisterhood indeed[17]."

The four poems contained about two thousand five hundred lines; and these he thought, with a few select smaller pieces, about seven or eight perhaps, the best he could find in a bookful which he had by him,

[17] Feb. 18, 1781.

would furnish a volume of tolerable bulk, that needed not to be indebted to an unreasonable breadth of margin for the importance of its figure. The letters which Cowper received seem either not to have been preserved by him, or to have been destroyed by others; and with this part of his correspondence many circumstances which would have thrown light upon his history have perished. It is not known whether the intention of publishing his poems originated at Olney, or was suggested by Mr. Newton; but he has told us what the reasons were which actuated him.

"If a board of inquiry were to be established, at which poets were to undergo an examination respecting the motives that induced them to publish, and I were to be summoned to attend, that I might give an account of mine, I think I could truly say, what perhaps few poets could, that though I have no objection to lucrative consequences, if any such should follow, they are not my aim; much less is it my ambition to exhibit myself to the world as a genius. What then, says Mr. President, can possibly be your motive? I answer, with a bow—Amusement. There is nothing but this, —no occupation within the compass of my small sphere, poetry excepted,—that can do much towards diverting that train of melancholy thoughts, which, when I am not thus employed, are for ever pouring themselves in upon me. And if I did not publish what I write, I could not interest myself sufficiently in my own success, to make an amusement of it[18]."

The business of finding a publisher was undertaken

[18] To Mr. Newton, March 18, 1781.

by Mr. Newton, who found one in his old friend Johnson[19], with whom he had had dealings of his own. The publisher took upon himself the whole risk, but seems to have requested that the book should not appear as an anonymous work. When this was communicated to the poet, he replied, "Since writing is become one of my principal amusements, and I have already produced so many verses on subjects that entitle them to a hope that they may possibly be useful, I should be sorry to suppress them entirely, or to publish them to no purpose, for want of that chief ingredient, the name of the author. If my name, therefore, will serve them in any degree, as a passport into public notice, they are welcome to it; and Mr. Johnson will, if he pleases, announce me to the world by the style and title of

WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.
Of the Inner Temple[20]."

It was not till all preliminaries had been adjusted that Cowper acquainted Mr. Unwin with his inten-

[19] When the Olney Hymns were about to be printed, Mr. Newton said in a letter to Mr. Thornton, (Feb. 13, 1779,) "To you I entirely submit the choice of the printer or bookseller. If it was a matter of perfect indifference to you, I have had a thought of my old friend, Joseph Johnson, in St. Paul's Churchyard. He printed my Narrative and volume of Sermons; and though he is not a professor, I believe him a man of honour and integrity."

In a former letter (Feb. 2, 1773) he had said, "I am afraid things are come to that pass, that professors in general find they may more safely depend upon the people of the world, than upon one another."

[20] To Mr. Newton, March 5, 1781.

tions. "You may suppose," he said, "by the size of the publication, (an octavo volume price three shillings,) that the greatest part of the poems have been long kept secret, but the truth is that they are, most of them, except what you have in your possession, the produce of the last winter. The principal, I may say the only reason why I never mentioned to you till now, an affair which I am just going to make known to all the world, (if *that* Mr. All-the-world should think it worth his knowing,) has been this,—that till within these few days I had not the honour to know it myself. This may seem strange, but it is true; for not knowing where to find underwriters who would choose to insure them; and not finding it convenient to a purse like mine to run any hazard, even upon the credit of my own ingenuity, I was very much in doubt for some weeks whether any bookseller would be willing to subject himself to an ambiguity that might prove very expensive in case of a bad market. But Johnson has heroically set all peradventures at defiance and taken the whole charge upon himself. So out I come[21]!

Mr. Newton had been a little jealous that his friend dealt more liberally with Mr. Unwin in the way of poetical export, than with him[22]! It was now Unwin's turn to feel a jealousy of the same kind. "I expected," says Cowper, "you would be grieved; if you had not been so, those sensibilities which attend you upon every other occasion, must have left you upon this. I am sorry that I have given you pain, but not sorry that you have felt it. A concern of that sort would

[21] May 1, 1781. [22] To Mr. Newton, July 30, 1781.

be absurd, because it would be to regret your friendship for me, and to be dissatisfied with the effect of it. Allow yourself, however, three minutes only for reflection, and your penetration must necessarily dive into the motives of my conduct. In the first place, and by way of preface, remember that I do not (whatever your partiality may incline you to do) account it of much consequence to any friend of mine, whether he is or is not employed by me upon such an occasion. But all affected renunciations of poetical merit apart, (and all unaffected expressions of the sense I have of my own littleness in the poetical character too,) the obvious and only reason why I resorted to Mr. Newton, and not to my friend Unwin was this—that the former lived in London, the latter at Stock; the former was upon the spot to correct the press, to give instructions respecting any sudden alterations, and to settle with the publisher every thing that might possibly occur in the course of such a business:—the latter could not be applied to for these purposes, without what would be a manifest encroachment on his kindness; because it might happen, that a troublesome office might cost him now and then a journey, which it was absolutely impossible for me to endure the thought of.

"When I wrote to you for the copies you have sent me, I told you I was making a collection, but not with a design to publish. There is nothing truer than at that time I had not the smallest expectation of sending a volume of Poems to the press. I had several small pieces that might amuse, but I would not, when I publish, make the amusement of the

reader my only object. When the winter deprived me of other employments, I began to compose, and seeing six or seven months before me which would naturally afford me much leisure for such a purpose, I undertook a piece of some length; that finished, another; and so on, till I had amassed the number of lines I mentioned in my last.

"Believe of me what you please, but not that I am indifferent to you or your friendship for me on any occasion[23]."

When Mr. Newton objected to any thing in the manuscript, Cowper seems generally to have justified, and then to have altered or expunged it, in deference to his friend. Upon occasion of some strong expression which had not been allowed to pass the censureship, he says, "I little suspected you would object to it.—I am no friend to the use of words taken from what an uncle of mine called the diabolical dictionary; but it happens sometimes that a coarse expression is almost necessary to do justice to the indignation excited by an abominable subject." He thanked him, however, for his opinion, and said, that "though poetry is apt to betray one into a warmth that one is not sensible of in writing prose, he should always desire to be set down by it[24]."

Upon a similar occasion he replies to Mr. Newton, "The passage you object to I inserted merely by way of catch, and think it is not unlikely to answer the purpose. My design was to say as many serious things as I could, and yet to be as lively as was compatible with such a purpose. Do not imagine that I

[23] May 10, 1781. [24] Feb. 18, 1781.

mean to stickle for it as a pretty creature of my own that I am loth to part with,—but I am apprehensive that without the sprightliness of that passage to introduce it, the following paragraph would not show to advantage. If the world had been filled with men like myself, I should never have written it; but thinking myself in a measure obliged to tickle, if I meant to please, I therefore affected a jocularity I did not feel. As to the rest, wherever there is war, there is misery and outrage; notwithstanding which it is not only lawful to wish, but even a duty to pray for the success of one's country. And as to the neutralities, I really think the Russian virago an impertinent puss for meddling with us, and engaging half a score kittens of her acquaintance to scratch the poor old lion, who, if he has been insolent in his day, has probably acted no otherwise than they themselves would have acted in his circumstances, and with his power to embolden them[25]."

This brought a rejoinder, and in a tone to which Cowper immediately yielded, saying, "I am sorry that I gave you the trouble to write twice upon so trivial a subject as the passage in question. I did not understand by your first objection to it, that you thought it so exceptionable as you do; but being better informed, I immediately resolved to expunge it, and subjoin a few lines which you will oblige me by substituting in its place. I am not very fond of weaving a political thread into any of my pieces, and that for two reasons; first, because I do not think myself qualified in point of intelligence, to form a decided

[25] March 5, 1781.

opinion on any such topics, and secondly, because I think them, though perhaps as popular as any, the most useless of all[26]."

Upon sending to Mr. Newton what he called his "Works complete, bound in brown paper," and numbered according to the series in which he would have them published, Cowper called upon his friend for farther assistance. "With respect to the poem called '*Truth*,'" said he, "it is so *true*, that it can hardly fail of giving offence to an unenlightened reader. I think, therefore, that in order to obviate in some measure those prejudices that will naturally erect their bristles against it, an explanatory preface[27], such as you (and nobody so well as you) can furnish me with, will have every grace of propriety to recommend it. Or, if you are not averse to the task, and your avocations will allow you to undertake it, I should be glad to be indebted to you for a preface to the whole[28]." Mr. Newton demurred, upon the ground of his own incompetence for such a task; to this Cowper replied, that not having the least doubt himself upon that score, and being convinced that there ought to be

[26] March 18.

[27] The origin of this request seems to be intimated in a letter written some two months before, just after one of Mr. Newton's publications, (probably his Cardiphonia,) had reached Olney: "I shall not repeat to you," says Cowper, "what I said to Mrs. Unwin after having read two or three of the letters. I admire the Preface, in which you have given an air of novelty to a worn out topic, and have actually engaged the favour of the reader by saying those things in a delicate and uncommon way, which in general are disgusting." Jan. 21.

[28] April 8, 1781.

none, he neither withdrew his requisition, nor abated one jot of the earnestness with which it was made. "I admit," said he, "the delicacy of the occasion, but am far from apprehending that you will therefore find it difficult to succeed. You can draw a hair-stroke, where another man would make a blot as broad as a sixpence[29]."

All preliminaries having thus, as it seemed, been arranged, Cowper thought that while the three first of his longer poems were under the printer's hands he might "be spinning and weaving the last," which in his own opinion, ("for an opinion," said he, "I am obliged to have about what I write, whether I will or no,") he was writing with more emphasis and energy than in either of his others. The whole he hoped would be ready for publication before the proper season should be past, .. for new books have their season, like most articles that are carried to market. He looked to this with a degree of pleasurable impatience. But if the art of printing had been in use in the land of Uz, Job, when he wished that his enemy had written a book, might have wished that he would print it also. When this hope had been two months delayed, Cowper writes thus to Mr. Unwin.

"If a writer's friends have need of patience, how much more the writer! Your desire to see my Muse in public, and mine to gratify you, must both suffer the mortification of delay. I expected that my trumpeter would have informed the world by this time of all that is needful for them to know upon such an occasion; and that an advertising blast blown through

[29] April 23.

every newspaper would have said — 'The poet is coming!'—But man, especially man that writes verse, is born to disappointments, as surely as printers and booksellers are born to be the most dilatory and tedious of all creatures. The plain English of this magnificent preamble is, that the season of publication is just elapsed, that the town is going into the country every day, and that my book cannot appear till they return,—that is to say, not till next winter. This misfortune, however, comes not without its attendant advantage; I shall now have, what I should not otherwise have had, an opportunity to correct the press myself; no small advantage upon any occasion, but especially important where poetry is concerned. A single erratum may knock out the brains of a whole passage, and that perhaps of which of all others the unfortunate poet is the most proud. Add to this, that now and then there is to be found in a printing-house a presumptuous intermeddler who will fancy himself a poet too, and what is still worse, a better than he that employs him. The consequence is, that with cobbling, and tinkering, and patching on here and there a shred of his own, he makes such a difference between the original and the copy, that an author cannot know his own work again. Now as I choose to be responsible for nobody's dulness but my own, I am a little comforted when I reflect, that it will be in my power to prevent all such impertinence."

Before the expiration of that month, however, Johnson had begun to print. Much to the credit of his discernment, he manifested a more than ordinary interest in the contents of the volume which he was to

publish, and perused them critically in the proof sheets. Cowper, when he was informed of this, replied, "I had rather submit to chastisement now, than be obliged to undergo it hereafter. If Johnson, therefore, will mark with a marginal Q, those lines that he, or his, object to as not sufficiently finished, I will willingly retouch them, or give a reason for my refusal. I shall moreover think myself obliged by any hint of that sort; as I do already to somebody, who, by running here and there two or three paragraphs into one, has very much improved the arrangement of my matter. I am apt, I know, to fritter it into too many pieces, and by doing so, to disturb that order to which all writings must owe their perspicuity,—at least in a considerable measure[30]." After awhile he says, "Johnson uses the discretion my poetship has allowed him, with much discernment. He has suggested several alterations, or rather marked several defective passages, which I have corrected, much to the advantage of the poems. In the last sheet he sent me, he noticed three such, all which I have reduced into better order. In the foregoing sheet I assented to his criticisms in some instances, and chose to abide by the original expression in others. Thus we jog on together comfortably enough; and perhaps it would be as well for authors in general, if their booksellers, when men of some taste, were allowed, though not to tinker the work themselves, yet to point out the flaws, and humbly to recommend an improvement[31]."

Cowper now pleased himself with a second-sight of unborn volumes. He says to Mr. Newton, "I am in

[30] July 7, 1781. [31] Aug. 25.

the middle of an affair called 'Conversation,' which, as 'Table Talk' serves in the present volume by way of introductory fiddle to the band that follows, I design shall perform the same office in a second[32]." —"It is not a dialogue, as the title would lead you to surmise, nor does it bear the least resemblance to 'Table Talk,' except that it is serio-comic like all the rest. My design in it is to convince the world that they make but an indifferent use of their tongues, considering the intention of Providence when he endued them with the faculty of speech; to point out the abuses, which is the jocular part of the business; and to prescribe the remedy, which is the grave and sober[33]." Upon Johnson's expressing a wish to him that his pen might still be employed, he offered him this then unfinished poem, which he estimated at eight hundred lines, if he chose to swell the volume; he was told in reply, not to be afraid of making the volume too large, which Cowper interpreted to mean, that if he had still another piece there would be room for it. Another was upon the stocks. "I have already," said he, "begun, and proceeded a little way, in a poem called Retirement. My view in choosing that subject is to direct to the proper use of the opportunities it affords for the cultivation of a man's best interests; to censure the vices and the follies which people carry with them into their retreats, where they make no other use of their leisure than to gratify themselves with the indulgence of their favourite appetites, and to pay themselves by a life of pleasure, for a life of business. In conclusion, I would enlarge upon the

[32] July 22. [33] Aug. —.

happiness of that state, when discreetly enjoyed, and religiously improved. But all this is at present in embryo. I generally despair of my progress when I begin; but if, like my travelling 'Squire[34], I should kindle as I go, this likewise may make a part of the volume, for I have time enough before me[35]."

To an impatient author (and those who are young in authorship are generally impatient) the press always seems to proceed slowly. Cowper saw that Johnson having begun to print had given some sort of security for his perseverance, else the tardiness of his operations, he said, would almost tempt him to despair of the end. When he received a sort of apology for the printer's negligence, and a promise of greater diligence for the future, he observed there was need enough of both[36], and that, though he saw there was time enough before him, he saw likewise that no length of time could be sufficient for the accomplishment of a work that did not go forward[37]. "By Johnson's last note," he says to Mr. Newton, "I am ready to suspect that you have seen him, and endeavoured to quicken his proceedings. His assurance of greater expedition leads me to think so. I know little of booksellers or printers, but have heard from others that they are the most dilatory of all people; otherwise, I am not in a hurry, nor would be so troublesome; but am obliged to you, nevertheless, for your interference, if his promised alacrity be owing to any spur that you have given him[38]." Cowper's impatience, however, did not go beyond the degree of pleasureable excitement. A proof sheet was always

[34] In the "Progress of Error." [35] Aug. 25.
[36] July 22. [37] Aug. 16. [38] Aug. 25.

something to expect from post to post, which it would be a pleasure to receive. The summer of this year was probably the happiest he had ever past, and it proved in its consequence the most important.

The season was unusually hot; to such a degree indeed that Cowper said to Mr. Newton[39], "You seldom complain of too much sunshine, and if you are prepared for a heat somewhat like that of Africa, the south walk in our long garden will exactly suit you. Reflected from the gravel and from the walls, and beating upon your head at the same time, it may possibly make you wish you could enjoy for an hour or two that immensity of shade afforded by the gigantic trees still growing in the land of your captivity." This heat seems to have led to the first attempt at improving his comforts at Olney, .. a very humble one, but Cowper knew how to value little enjoyments. He writes to Mr. Newton[40], "I might date my letter from the green-house, which we have converted into a summer parlour. The walls hung with garden mats, and the floor covered with a carpet, the sun too in a great measure excluded by an awning of mats which forbids him to shine any where except upon the carpet, it affords us by far the pleasantest retreat in Olney. We eat, drink, and sleep where we always did; but here we spend all the rest of our time, and find that the sound of the wind in the trees, and the singing of birds, are much more agreeable to our ears than the incessant barking of dogs and screaming of children. It is an observation that naturally occurs upon the occasion, and which many other occasions furnish an

[39] May 28. [40] Aug. 16.

opportunity to make, that people long for what they have not, and overlook the good in their possession. This is so true in the present instance, that for years past I should have thought myself happy to enjoy a retirement even less flattering to my natural taste than this in which I am now writing; and have often looked wistfully at a snug cottage, which, on account of its situation at a distance from noise and disagreeable objects, seemed to promise me all I could wish or expect, so far as happiness may be said to be local; never once adverting to this comfortable nook, which affords me all that could be found in the most sequestered hermitage, with the advantage of having all those accommodations near at hand which no hermitage could possibly afford me. People imagine they should be happy in circumstances which they would find insupportably burthensome in less than a week. A man that has been clothed in fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, envies the peasant under a thatched hovel; who, in return, envies him as much his palace and his pleasure-ground. Could they change situations, the fine gentleman would find his ceilings were too low, and that his casements admitted too much wind; that he had no cellar for his wine, and no wine to put in his cellar. These, with a thousand other mortifying deficiencies, would shatter his romantic project into innumerable fragments in a moment. The clown, at the same time, would find the accession of so much unwieldy treasure an incumbrance quite incompatible with an hour's ease. His choice would be puzzled by variety. He would drink to excess, because he would foresee no end of his abundance;

and he would eat himself sick for the same reason. He would have no idea of any other happiness than sensual gratification; would make himself a beast, and die of his good fortune. The rich gentleman had, perhaps, or might have had, if he pleased, at the shortest notice, just such a recess as this; but if he had it, he overlooked it, or, if he had it not, forgot that he might command it whenever he would. The rustic too, was actually in possession of some blessings, which he was a fool to relinquish, but which he could neither see nor feel, because he had the daily and constant use of them; such as good health, bodily strength, a head and a heart that never ached, and temperance, to the practice of which he was bound by necessity, that, humanly speaking, was a pledge and a security for the continuance of them all.

" Thus I have sent you a schoolboy's theme. When I write to you, I do not write without thinking, but always without premeditation: the consequence is, that such thoughts as pass through my head when I am not writing make the subject of my letters to you."

In this greenhouse, " the myrtles, ranged before his window, made the most agreeable blind imaginable; he was undisturbed by noise, and saw none but pleasing objects." Fortunately he was not in this favourite retreat one day when two ladies happened to call at a shop opposite Mrs. Unwin's house. The one, by name Mrs. Jones, was one of their very few acquaintance, the wife of a clergyman, who resided in the village of Clifton, within a mile of Olney; Lady Austen the other, was her sister, and widow of a baronet. Cowper was so struck by her appearance, that, upon

hearing who she was, he requested Mrs. Unwin would invite them to tea. Shy as he was, this was an extraordinary movement on his part: his shyness returned when the invitation had been accepted; he wondered at himself, and was for a long while unwilling to face the little party which had been invited at his own desire; his better mind at last prevailed; and the shyest persons are perhaps the most unreserved when they meet with those with whom they feel themselves in sympathy. "Having forced himself," says Hayley, "to engage in conversation with Lady Austen, he was so reanimated by her colloquial talents that he attended the ladies on their return to Clifton, and from that time continued to cultivate the regard of his new acquaintance with such assiduous attention, that she soon received from him the familiar and endearing title of Sister Ann."

This was shortly after Mr. Newton's first visit to Olney since his removal from that cure, a visit which Cowper had greatly enjoyed during its continuance, but which like all such visits left an aching in his heart. "My sensations at your departure," he says to him[41], "were far from pleasant, and Mrs. Unwin suffered more upon the occasion than when you first took leave of Olney. When we shall meet again, and in what circumstances, or whether we shall meet or not, is an event to be found no where but in that volume of Providence which belongs to the current year, and will not be understood till it is accomplished. This, I know, that your visit was most agreeable here. It was so even to me, who, though I live in the midst of many agreeables, am but little sensible of their charms.

[41] July 7.

But when you came, I determined, as much as possible, to be deaf to the suggestions of despair; that if I could contribute but little to the pleasure of the opportunity I might not dash it with unseasonable melancholy, and, like an instrument with a broken string, interrupt the harmony of the concert."

In the same letter which began in this melancholy strain, Cowper mentioned Lady Austen's first visit, and that they had returned it; and he described her to his friend. "She is a lively agreeable woman; has seen much of the world, and accounts it a great simpleton as it is. She laughs and makes laugh; and keeps up a conversation without seeming to labour at it. To Mr. Unwin he says[42], "She is a most agreeable woman, and has fallen in love with your mother and me; insomuch, that I do not know but she may settle at Olney. Yesterday se'nnight we all dined together in the *Spinnie*—a most delightful retirement, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton of Weston. Lady Austen's lackey, and a lad that waits on me in the garden, drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of our *fête champêtre*. A board, laid over the top of the wheelbarrow, served us for a table; our dining-room was a root-house, lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock, the servants, who had dined under the great elm upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the wilderness, about half a mile off, and were at home again a little after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening, without one cross

[42] July 22.

occurrence, or the least weariness of each other. A happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of."

It was not long before an arrangement grew out of this new friendship, which was thus communicated to Mr. Newton. "Here is a new scene opening, which, whether it perform what it promises or not, will add fresh plumes to the wings of time; at least while it continues to be a subject of contemplation. If the project take effect, a thousand varieties will attend the change it will make in our situation at Olney. If not, it will serve, however, to speculate and converse upon, and steal away many hours, by engaging our attention, before it be entirely dropped. Lady Austen, very desirous of retirement, especially of a retirement near her sister, an admirer of Mr. Scott as a preacher, and of your two humble servants now in the green-house, as the most agreeable creatures in the world, is at present determined to settle here. That part of our great building which is at present occupied by Dick Coleman, his wife, child, and a thousand rats, is the corner of the world she chooses, above all others, as the place of her future residence. Next spring twelvemonth she begins to repair and beautify, and the following winter (by which time the lease of her house in town will determine) she intends to take possession. I am highly pleased with the plan, upon Mrs. Unwin's account, who, since Mrs. Newton's departure, is destitute of all female connexion, and has not, in any emergency, a woman to speak to. Mrs. Scott is indeed in the neighbourhood, and an excellent person, but always engaged by a close attention to her family, and no more than ourselves a lover of visiting. But

these things are all at present in the clouds. Two years must intervene,—and in two years not only this project, but all the projects in Europe may be disconcerted [43]."

Cowper's spirits received a wholesome impulse when the solitude, or rather (as he termed it) the duality of their condition at Olney seemed drawing to a conclusion. He said to Mr. Unwin that it had in his eyes "strong marks of providential interposition. A female friend, and one who bids fair to prove herself worthy of the appellation, comes recommended by a variety of considerations to such a place as Olney. Since Mr. Newton went, and till this lady came, there was not in the kingdom a retirement more absolutely such than ours. We did not want company, but when it came we found it agreeable. A person that has seen much of the world, and understands it well, has high spirits, a lively fancy, and great readiness of conversation, introduces a sprightliness into such a scene as this, which, if it was peaceful before, is not the worse for being a little enlivened. In case of illness too, to which all are liable, it was rather a gloomy prospect, if we allowed ourselves to advert to it, that there was hardly a woman in the place from whom it would have been reasonable to have expected either comfort or assistance. The present curate's wife is a valuable person, but has a family of her own, and though a neighbour, is not a very near one. But if this plan is effected, we shall be in a manner one family, and I suppose never pass a day without some intercourse with each other [44]."

[43] Aug. 21.

[44] Aug. 25.

Lady Austen returned to town in October. Cowper told her to expect a visit there from Mr. Unwin; "an enterprise," said he to his friend, "which you may engage in with the more alacrity, because as she loves any thing that has any connexion with your mother, she is sure to feel a sufficient partiality for her son. She has many features in her character which you will admire; but one in particular, on account of the rarity of it, will engage your attention and esteem. She has a degree of gratitude in her composition, so quick a sense of obligation as is hardly to be found in any rank of life; and, if report says true, is scarce indeed in the superior. Discover but a wish to please her, and she never forgets it; not only thanks you, but the tears will start into her eyes at the recollection of the smallest service. With these fine feelings she has the most, and the most harmless, vivacity you can imagine. In short she is—what you will find her to be upon half an hour's conversation with her[45]."

Cowper addressed a poetical epistle to her in London, in the manner of his old associate, poor Lloyd.

> Dear Anna, between friend and friend,
> Prose answers every common end;
> Serves in a plain and homely way,
> T' express th' occurrence of the day;
> Our health, the weather, and the news;
> What walks we take, what books we choose;
> And all the floating thoughts we find
> Upon the surface of the mind.
>
> But when a poet takes the pen,
> Far more alive than other men,

[45] Sept. 26.

He feels a gentle tingling come
Down to his finger[46] and his thumb,
Deriv'd from nature's noblest part,
The centre of a glowing[46] heart:
And this is what the world, who knows
No flights above the pitch of prose,
His more sublime vagaries slighting,
Denominates an itch for writing.
No wonder I, who scribble rhyme
To catch the triflers of the time,
And tell them truths divine and clear,
Which, couch'd in prose, they will not hear;
Who labour hard to allure and draw
The loiterers I never saw,
Should feel that itching, and that tingling,
With all my purpose intermingling,
To your intrinsic merit true,
When call'd t' address myself to you.

Mysterious are His ways, whose power
Brings forth that unexpected hour,
When minds, that never met before,
Shall meet, unite, and part no more:
It is th' allotment of the skies,
The hand of the supremely Wise,
That guides and governs our affections,
And plans and orders our connections;
Directs us in our distant road,
And marks the bounds of our abode.
Thus we were settled when you found us,
Peasants and children all around us,

---

[46] Perhaps Cowper remembered John Bunyan's lines in which that glorious tinker describes the origin of his Pilgrim's Progress:

It came from mine own heart, so to my head,
And thence into my fingers trickeled:
Thence to my pen, from whence immediately
On paper I did dribble it daintily.

Not dreaming of so dear a friend
Deep in the abyss of Silver-End[47].
Thus Martha—e'en against her will
Perch'd on the top of yonder hill;
And you,—though you must needs prefer
The fairer scenes of sweet Sancerre[48],
Are come from distant Loire, to choose
A cottage on the banks of Ouse.
This page of Providence, quite new,
And now just opening to our view,
Employs our present thoughts and pains
To guess, and spell, what it contains:
But day by day, and year by year,
Will make the dark enigma clear;
And furnish us, perhaps, at last,
Like other scenes already past,
With proof, that we, and our affairs,
Are part of a Jehovah's cares:
For God unfolds by slow degrees,
The purport of his deep decrees;
Sheds every hour a clearer light
In aid of our defective sight;
And spreads, at length, before the soul,
A beautiful and perfect whole,
Which busy man's inventive brain
Toils to anticipate in vain.

Say, Anna, had you never known
The beauties of a rose full blown,
Could you, though luminous your eye,
By looking on the bud, descry,
Or guess, with a prophetic power,
The future splendour of the flower?
Just so, the Omnipotent, who turns
The system of a world's concerns,

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[47] An obscure part of Olney, adjoining to the residence of Cowper, which faced the market-place.

[48] Lady Austen's residence in France.

From mere minutiæ can educe
Events of most important use,
And bid a dawning sky display
The blaze of a meridian day.
The works of man tend, one and all,
As needs they must, from great to small;
And vanity absorbs at length
The monuments of human strength.
But who can tell how vast the plan,
Which this day's incident began?
Too small, perhaps, the slight occasion
For our dim-sighted observation;
It pass'd unnoticed, as the bird
That cleaves the yielding air unheard;
And yet may prove, when understood,
An harbinger of endless good.

Not that I deem, or mean to call,
Friendship, a blessing cheap, or small:
But merely to remark, that ours,
Like some of nature's sweetest flowers,
Rose from a seed of tiny size,
That seem'd to promise no such prize:
A transient visit intervening,
And made almost without a meaning,
(Hardly the effect of inclination,
Much less of pleasing expectation,)
Produc'd a friendship, then begun,
That has cemented us in one;
And placed it in our power to prove,
By long fidelity and love,
That Solomon has wisely spoken;
"A threefold cord is not soon broken."

"In this interesting poem," says Hayley, "the author expresses a lively and devout presage of the superior productions that were to arise in the process of time, from a friendship so unexpected and so pleas-

ing; but he does not seem to have been aware, in the slightest degree, of the evident dangers that must naturally attend an intimacy so very close, yet perfectly innocent, between a poet and two ladies, who, with very different mental powers, had each reason to flatter herself that she could agreeably promote the studies, and animate the fancy of this fascinating bard."

Considering the good sense and the principles of all parties, and, moreover, the age of two of them (Cowper being then fifty and Mrs. Unwin seven years older), the danger will not be deemed so evident as Hayley considered it to have been, .. after the event. Every circumstance is interesting in the story of a friendship which produced such consequences in our literature; for if Cowper had never known Lady Austen, it may well be doubted whether he would ever have attained that popularity and that fame which he will hold as long as English shall continue to be the language of a civilized people. The friendship which promised so fairly had nearly been nipt in the bud.

A few weeks after the date of his poetical epistle to Lady Austen, Cowper wrote thus to Mr. Unwin[49]: "I have a piece of secret history to communicate which I would have imparted sooner, but that I thought it possible there might be no occasion to mention it at all. When persons for whom I have felt a friendship disappoint and mortify me by their conduct, or act unjustly towards me, though I no longer esteem them friends, I still feel that tenderness for their character,

[49] Feb. 9, 1782.

that I would conceal the blemish if I could. But in making known the following anecdote to you, I run no risk of a publication, assured that when I have once enjoined you secrecy, you will observe it. My letters have already apprized you of that close and intimate connexion that took place between the lady you visited in Queen Anne Street and us. Nothing could be more promising, though sudden in the commencement. She treated us with as much unreservedness of communication, as if we had been born in the same house, and educated together. At her departure she herself proposed a correspondence, and because writing does not agree with your mother, proposed a correspondence with me. This sort of intercourse had not been long maintained, before I discovered, by some slight intimation of it, that she had conceived displeasure at something I had written, though I cannot now recollect it. Conscious of none but the most upright and inoffensive intentions, I yet apologized for the passage in question, and the flaw was healed again. Our correspondence, after this, proceeded smoothly for a considerable time; but at length having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend it to her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant; and intimating, that when we embellish a creature with colours taken from our own fancy, and, so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an

idol, and have nothing to expect in the end but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. Your mother heard me read the letter; she read it herself, and honoured it with her warm approbation. But it gave mortal offence. It received, indeed, an answer, but such a one as I could by no means reply to: and thus ended (for it is impossible it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bade fair to be lasting,—being formed with a woman whose seeming stability of temper, whose knowledge of the world, and great experience of its folly, but above all, whose sense of religion and seriousness of mind (for with all that gaiety she is a great thinker), induced us both, in spite of that cautious reserve that marks our character, to trust her, to love and value her, and to open our hearts for her reception. It may be necessary to add, that by her own desire I wrote to her under the assumed relation of a brother, and she to me as a sister—*ceu fumus in auras*.... We have recovered from the concern we suffered on account of the *fracas* above-mentioned, though for some days it made us unhappy. Not knowing but that she might possibly become sensible in a few days that she had acted hastily and unreasonably, and renew the correspondence herself, I could not in justice apprize you of this quarrel sooner; but some weeks having passed without any proposals of accommodation, I am now persuaded that none are intended, and in justice to you, am obliged to caution you against a repetition of your visit."

Cowper, however, soon had to communicate that

the advances of which he despaired had been made. "Having," he says, "unfolded to you an account of the *fracas* between us and Lady Austen, it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with every event that bears any relation to that incident. The day before yesterday she sent us by her brother-in-law, Mr. Jones, three pair of worked ruffles, with advice that I should soon receive a fourth. I knew they were begun before we quarrelled. I begged Mr. Jones to tell her, when he wrote next, how much I thought myself obliged; and gave him to understand that I should make her a very inadequate, though the only return in my power, by laying my volume at her feet: this likewise she had previous reason given her to expect. Thus stands the affair at present. Whether any thing in the shape of a reconciliation is to take place hereafter, I know not; but this I know, that when an amicable freedom of intercourse, and that unreserved confidence which belongs only to true friendship has been once unrooted, plant it again with what care you may, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to make it grow. The fear of giving offence to a temper too apt to take it, is unfavourable to that comfort we propose to ourselves even in our ordinary connexions, but absolutely incompatible with the pleasures of real friendship. She is to spend the summer in our neighbourhood. Lady —— and Miss —— are to be of the party; the former a dissipated woman of fashion, and the latter a haughty beauty. Retirement is our passion and our delight. It is in still life alone we look for that measure of happiness we can

rationally expect below. What have we to do, therefore, with characters like these? Shall we go to the dancing-school again? Shall we cast off the simplicity of our plain and artless demeanour, to learn, and not in a youthful day neither, the manners of those whose manners at the best are their only recommendation, and yet can in reality recommend them to none but to people like themselves? This would be folly which nothing but necessity could excuse, and in our case no such necessity can possibly obtain. We will not go into the world, and if the world would come to us, we must give it the French answer, *Monsieur et Madame ne sont pas visibles*[50]."

But it depended upon the lady whether or not this intercourse should be renewed; and this was felt at Olney. "We are far," says Cowper, "from wishing a renewal of the connexion we have lately talked about. We did, indeed, find it in a certain way an agreeable one, while that lady continued in the country; yet not altogether compatible with our favourite plan; with that silent retirement in which we have spent so many years, and in which we wish to spend what are yet before us. She is exceedingly sensible, has great quickness of parts and an uncommon fluency of expression; but her vivacity was sometimes too much for us; occasionally, perhaps, it might refresh and revive us, but it more frequently exhausted us, neither your mother nor I being in that respect at all a match for her. But after all, it does not entirely depend upon us whether our former intimacy shall take place

[50] February 24.

again or not; or rather, whether we shall attempt to cultivate it, or give it over, as we are most inclined to do, in despair. I suspect a little, by her sending the ruffles, and by the terms in which she spoke of us to you, that some overtures on her part are to be looked for. Should this happen, however we may wish to be reserved, we must not be rude; but I can answer for us both, that we shall enter into the connexion again with great reluctance, not hoping for any better fruit of it than it has already produced. If you thought she fell short of the description I gave of her, I still think, however, that it was not a partial one, and that it did not make too favourable a representation of her character. You *must* have seen her to disadvantage; a consciousness of a quarrel so recent, and in which she had expressed herself with a warmth that she knew must have affronted and shocked us both, must unavoidably have produced its effect upon her behaviour, which, though it could not be awkward, must have been in some degree unnatural; her attention being necessarily pretty much engrossed by a recollection of what had passed between us. I would by no means have hazarded you into her company, if I had not been sure that she would treat you with politeness, and almost persuaded that she would soon see the unreasonableness of her conduct, and make a suitable apology[51]."

The reconciliation, as might now be expected[52],

[51] March 7, 1782.

[52] To this occasion the extract must be referred, which Hayley has printed from an undated letter to Mr. Unwin, wherein Cowper says, "We are reconciled. She (Lady Austen) seized the

easily took place, and the parties were soon as happy in each other's society as before. Lady Austen's

first opportunity to embrace your mother with tears of the tenderest affection. We were all a little awkward at first, but now are as easy as ever." Hayley says, immediately before he introduces the passage, "In the whole course of this work I have endeavoured to recollect, on every doubtful occasion, the feelings of Cowper; and made it a rule to reject whatever my perfect intimacy with those feelings could lead me to suppose the spirit of the departed poet might wish me to lay aside as unfit for publication. I consider an editor as guilty of the basest injury to the dead, who admits into the posthumous volumes of an author whom he professes to love and admire, any composition which his own conscience informs him *that author*, if he could speak from the tomb, would direct him to suppress. On this principle I have declined to print some letters, which entered more than I think the public ought to enter into the history of a trifling feminine discord, that disturbed the perfect harmony of the happy trio at Olney when Lady Austen and Mrs. Unwin were the united inspirers of the poet."

The rule which Hayley prescribed to himself is what every biographer, circumstanced as he was, ought to observe; but I think it was, in this instance, applicable only while Lady Austen was living, if he alludes to the foresaid interruption of their friendship at this time; and that when he spoke of "a trifling feminine discord," the words imply something more discreditable to two such women than the affair itself can be deemed. Lady Austen was evidently one of those persons who are too sensitive for their own happiness; and it may be collected from Cowper's account, that in warning her against expecting and exacting too much from those she loved, he fell into a strain so unlike that of his conversation and of his former letters, that she was surprised at it: and the same cause which seems to have suspended Lady Hesketh's correspondence with a kinsman whom she loved so dearly, provoked from her a hasty and perhaps a tart reply.

fashionable friends occasioned no embarrassment; they seemed to have preferred some more fashionable place for summering in, for they are not again spoken of. The plan of fitting up that wing of the house which was held in joint occupance by Dick Coleman and the rats, was found impracticable, but an arrangement was made at the vicarage, and preparations were made for her entering upon this abode in the autumn.

During the short interruption of their friendship, Cowper happily had his mind much occupied with the business of the press. The task of correcting he was never weary of, being of opinion "that the secret of almost all good writing, especially in verse, is to touch and retouch; though some writers boast of negligence, and others would be ashamed to show their foul copies[53]." "A lapidary," he says, "I suppose accounts it a laborious part of his business to rub away the roughness of the stone; but it is my amusement; and if, after all the polishing I can give it, it discovers some little lustre, I think myself well rewarded for my pains[54]." It was only upon his poems that Cowper bestowed this labour. His letters were written as easily as they appear to have been; they would not otherwise have been inimitable. It is certain that he made no "foul copies" of them; they are in a clear, beautiful, running hand, and it is rarely that an erasure occurs in them, or the slightest alteration of phrase.

Mr. Newton suggested that a copy of the forth-

[53] To Mr. Unwin, July 2, 1780. [54] Aug. 9, 1780.

coming volume should be sent to Dr. Johnson, and Cowper perfectly acquiesced in the propriety, "though I well know," said he, "that one of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen to be displeased, would soon find its way into all companies, and spoil the sale. Whatever faults I may be chargeable with as a poet, I cannot accuse myself of negligence. I never suffer a line to pass till I have made it as good as I can; and though my doctrines may offend this king of critics, he will not, I flatter myself, be disgusted by slovenly inaccuracy, either in the numbers, rhymes, or language. Let the rest take its chance. It is possible he may be pleased; and if he should, I shall have engaged on my side one of the best trumpeters in the kingdom. Let him only speak as favourably of me as he has spoken of Sir Richard Blackmore (who, though he shines in his poem called Creation, has written more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country), and my success will be secured[55]." "I think it would be well to send it in our joint names, accompanied with a handsome card, such an one as you will know how to fabricate, and such as may predispose him to a favourable perusal of the book, by coaxing him into a good temper; for he is a great bear, with all his learning and penetration[56]."

Mr. Newton, however, changed his mind upon this point, and Cowper, who, like all good natured men, was easily persuaded in trifles, agreed with him again, and seemed to feel that there would be an unfitness in

[55] Sept. 18, 1781. [56] Oct. 4.

appearing to wish the critical opinion of one whose taste was in some important points opposed to his own. "He finds fault," says Cowper, "too often like a man that, having sought it very industriously, is at last obliged to stick it on a pin's point, and look at it through a microscope." He was well pleased with a proposal that Mr. Newton's name should appear in the title page as editor, saying, "I do not care under how many names you appear in a book that calls me author." A friend, however, of Mr. Newton was of opinion that he had already taken too much part in it, and that his preface, instead of serving the volume which introduced, would injuriously affect the sale. Upon this Cowper observed, "Mr. Bates, without intending it, has passed a severer censure upon the modern world of readers, than any that can be found in my volume. If they are so merrily disposed, in the midst of a thousand calamities, that they will not deign to read a preface of three or four pages, because the purport of it is serious, they are far gone indeed, and in the last stage of a frenzy, such as I suppose has prevailed in all nations that have been exemplarily punished, just before the infliction of the sentence. But though he lives in the world he has so ill an opinion of, and ought therefore to know it better than I, who have no intercourse with it at all, I am willing to hope that he may be mistaken. Curiosity is an universal passion. There are few people who think a book worth their reading, but feel a desire to know something about the writer of it. This desire will naturally lead them to peep into the preface, where

they will soon find that a little perseverance will furnish them with some information on the subject. If, therefore, your preface finds no readers, I shall take it for granted that it is because the book itself is accounted not worth their notice. Be that as it may, it is quite sufficient that I have played the antic myself for their diversion; and that, in a state of dejection such as they are absolute strangers to, I have sometimes put on an air of cheerfulness and vivacity, to which I myself am in reality a stranger, for the sake of winning their attention to more useful matter. I cannot endure the thought for a moment, that you should descend to my level on the occasion, and court their favour in a style not more unsuitable to your function, than to the constant and consistent strain of your whole character and conduct. No—let the preface stand. I cannot mend it. I could easily make a jest of it, but it is better as it is[57]."

When the preface was printed, the publisher, who knew Mr. Newton well and esteemed him highly, but was likely to consult with persons of a widely different school, took fright at it, and wrote to Cowper, expressing his anxious wish that it might be cancelled. He said that though it would serve to recommend the volume to the religious, it would disgust the profane; that in reality there was no need of a preface at all; and that if Cowper would consent to have it withdrawn, he would undertake to manage that matter with the writer. Cowper, as he had found Johnson "a very

[57] To Mr. Newton, Oct. 22, 1781.

judicious man on other occasions," was willing that he should determine for him upon this, thinking it best to abide by the judgement of one "who by his occupation was bound to understand what would promote the sale of a book, and what would hinder it." "What course he determines upon," said he to Mr. Newton, "I do not know, nor am I at all anxious about it. It is impossible for me, however, to be so insensible of your kindness in writing the preface, as not to be desirous of defying all contingencies, rather than entertain a wish to suppress it. It will do me honour in the eyes of those whose good opinion is indeed an honour, and if it hurts me in the estimation of others, I cannot help it; the fault is neither yours nor mine; but theirs. If a minister's is a more splendid character than a poet's, (and I think nobody that understands their value can hesitate in deciding that question,) then undoubtedly the advantage of having our names united in the same volume is all on my side[58]."

Mr. Newton of course consented to the withdrawal, and accordingly it was withdrawn, "not for containing any thing offensively peculiar, but as being thought too pious for a world that grew more foolish and more careless, as it grew older." Yet Johnson might have considered that Mr. Newton's recommendation would bespeak for the volume a good reception among what is called the religious public, and that among the profane, none who could relish the poems would be

[58] Feb. 1782.

deterred by the preface from reading them; that if the account which it gave of the author should fail to awaken old feelings in the literary circle wherein he had formerly moved, it would be read with interest by many to whom his name was unknown; that a favourable curiosity might be excited by it in those who had hearts to feel; and that such an introduction was itself a novelty which was likely to attract attention.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

AND

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Hooker's Epitaph, by Sir William Cowper, p. 3.—It is thus printed by Izaak Walton :—

> Though nothing can be spoke worthy his fame,
> Or the remembrance of that precious name,
> Judicious Hooker; though this cost be spent
> On him that hath a lasting monument
> In his own books; yet ought we to express,
> If not his worth, yet our respectfulness.
> Church-ceremonies he maintain'd, then why
> Without all ceremony should he die[1]?
> Was it because his life and death should be
> Both equal patterns of humility?
> Or that perhaps this only glorious one
> Was above all, to ask, why had he none?
> Yet he that lay so long obscurely low,
> Doth now preferr'd to greater honours go.
> Ambitious men, learn hence to be more wise;
> Humility is the true way to rise;
> And God in me this lesson did inspire,
> To bid this humble man, "Friend, sit up higher!"

Westminster, p. 16.—Cowper even liked the school well enough to admire the worst things belonging to it,—its grammars. "I am no friend," he says, "to Lilly's Grammar, though I was indebted to him for my first introduction to the Latin language. The grammars used at Westminster, both for the Latin and the Greek, are those to which, if I had a young man

[1] Qu. *lie?*

to educate, I should give the preference. They have the merit of being compendious and perspicuous, in both which properties I judge Lilly to be defective. They are called Busby's Grammars, though Busby did not compose them. The compilation was a task imposed upon his uppermost boys, the plan only being drawn by the master, and the versification, which I have often admired for the ingenuity of it, being theirs. I never knew a boy of any abilities, who had taken his notion of language from these grammars, that was not accurate to a degree that distinguished him from most others."—*Letter to Mr. Unwin, July 3*, 1784.

I do not think any Westminster man would agree with Cowper in his opinion of the aforesaid grammars. As for their being compendious and perspicuous, I should not be more surprised at hearing them called entertaining.

Benefit derived both from the discipline of Westminster and its indiscipline, p. 18.—" One constant blunder of these New Broomers," says Mr. Coleridge, " these Penny Magazine sages and philanthropists, in reference to our public schools, is to confine their views to what schoolmasters teach the boys, with entire oversight of all that the boys are excited to learn from each other, and of themselves, with more geniality even *because* it is *not* a part of their compelled school knowledge. An Eton boy's knowledge of the St. Laurence, Mississippi, Missouri, Orellana, &c. will be generally found in exact proportion to his knowledge of the Ilissus, Hebrus, Orontes, &c.; inasmuch as modern travels and voyages are more entertaining and fascinating than Cellarius; or Robinson Crusoe, Dampier, and Captain Cook, than the Periegesis. Compare the *lads* themselves from Eton and Harrow, &c. with the *alumni* of the New Broom Institution, and not the lists of school lessons; and be that comparison the criterion."—*Table Talk*, ii. 224.

In 1756 he lost his father, p. 30.—" Biographers," says Dr. Memes, " have stated, that Cowper was but little affected by his father's death. Certainly nothing to the contrary appears in the poet's writings; but the cause assigned, namely, a depression of spirits, which is said to have hindered him from duly estimating the magnitude of the blow, did not at this time exist. The first attack had passed away, and the second and more

dreadful one had its commencement many years afterwards. Granting, then, the fact, we must seek some other explanation. Though there is no reason to doubt the filial reverence and respect with which Cowper regarded his surviving parent, yet the prolonged interruption of that personal intercourse which to the sentiment of duty adds the intensity of love and attachment, had never allowed these feelings fully to unfold themselves. We have already seen that the poet draws from his own experience the picture of a youthful heart chilled and seared by early separation from home and its associations. Hardly can any subsequent opportunity make up for the vividness of first impressions on the opening affections of childhood; or for the loss of that season when the child so guilelessly, so insensibly, yet so sweetly and certainly, gains the proper station in the parental bosom. But that Cowper's disposition naturally overflowed with this genuine kindliness, needs no other proof than the affectionate sincerity with which, at the very time of which we now speak, he regarded another relative. 'How well,' says he, writing on this subject long afterwards, 'do I still remember, when I have been kept awake the whole night by the thought that my uncle might die before me.' Who does not recognise in these words the pure aspirations of his own young heart? and what clearer evidence can there be of the baneful effects of early dissipation and religious indifference, than their stifling in such a breast the yearnings of filial affection? For, conceding to absence and interruption of cordial intercourse all their effect in estranging relatives from each other, an absorbing and selfish dissipation—and dissipation is always selfish—could alone so speedily obliterate from a son's recollection the memory of a father."

I should be wanting in one of the first duties of a biographer if I did not express my indignation at the manner in which Cowper is treated in this passage. A double charge is here brought against him, that he felt little upon his father's death, and that this want of feeling was the effect of religious indifference, and of early, absorbing, selfish dissipation.

The proof of the first charge is, that "nothing to the contrary[2] appears in the poet's writings." Now any one who

[2] To refute such an argument by facts would be treating it with too much respect. It is best refuted by exposing its utter emptiness. But the reader may call to mind a singularly beautiful passage, (p. 30,) in which

thinks upon the matter for a moment may perceive that many of Cowper's letters have perished, many have not been published, and of those which have appeared in print, much has been suppressed. Let it be observed, also, that we have *none of his letters written at, or near, the time of his father's decease.* What then can be more unjust, or more uncharitable, than to accuse him of want of filial feeling on such an occasion, because no expression of it happened to be found in letters *written many years afterwards?*

This would be bad enough, if this were all; but it is even worse to account for the imputed want of feeling by *early, absorbing, selfish dissipation,* and this Dr. Memes supposes to be proved by Cowper's own confession! Into what error and injustice must men be led, if they take in a literal sense the exaggerated language of enthusiastic self-condemnation, even when (as in Cowper's case) it is undoubtedly sincere! What Cowper's dissipation amounted to has been shown in the text.

Original of the Letter to Clotworthy Rowley, Esq. p. 35.

Deliciæ et Lepores mei! *Lond. Aug.* 1758.

Qui Gallicé scripsisti, responsum habes Latinum; non quia Linguam hanc satis calleo, sed istam quia nimis ignoro. Literas Anglicanas te contempturum certò scivi. Dum tu Rhadamanthum tuum, quicunque is est, per villas atque oppida sectaris, majori, ut ais, opere quam lucro; ego, neque laborans, neque lucrum sperans, otiosam, ideoque mihi jucundissimam vitam ago; neque rus tibi invideo, lutulentum scilicet, et intempestivo diluvio quotidie obrutum. Aliquando autem et ego in suburbana rura, amicum vel amicam visurus, proficiscor: breve est iter, quod vel pedes, vel currú conducto facile perficias; perrarò enim, et nunquam nisi coactus, in caballum ascendo, quippe qui nates teneras habeo, quas exiguus usus contundit et dilacerat. Triduum nuper, Villæ quam dicunt Greenwich, commoratus sum. O beatum Triduum, quod si Triennium fuisset, immortalitatem Superis minime invidissem. Puellulam ibi amabilem et amatam, de quâ sæpius tibi locutus sum, inveni. Eâ Virgo est ætate (annos nata sedecim) ut dies singuli novum aliquod decus ad formam afferant. Modestiâ, et (quod mirum videtur in Fœminâ) taciturnitate est maximâ;

Cowper, more than thirty years after his father's death, speaks of his feelings upon going for the last time to the parsonage at Berkhampstead. If he had not loved his father dearly, and found that home a happy home whenever he went to it, he would not have "preferred it to a palace."

quando autem loquitur, crederes Musam loqui. Hei mihi, quod Sidus tam clarum alió spectet! Indiá Occidentali oriundum, illuc rediturum est; mihique nihil præter suspiria et lacrymas relicturum. Tu me amore sentes torqueri,—ego te lasciviá.——

Paucis abhinc diebus ad Hortos Bonæ Mariæ sum profectus; delicias ejus loci nequeo satis laudare. Ludi Scenici qui ibi exhibentur, more Italorum, nostrá vero linguá, sunt constituti. Partes quas Recitativas vocant, ridiculæ sunt ultrà modum; cantilenæ autem suavissimæ. Unum hoc timendum, ne sub Dio sedentem, tussis occupet vel febris.

Quod ad amicum nostrum Alston attinet, neque Epistolam mihi misit quamlibet, neque missurum reor; scio enim jamdudum ignavam hominis nuturum, et obliviosam. Si videris, objurgationes aliquos a me in eum confer, Culumque meum osculetur, jube.

Vale.

Nonsense Club, p. 37.—Dr. Memes says that Mr. De Grey, afterwards a judge, was one of this club. (p. 59.) He may be right, but as in his list of the members he omits Bensley, and includes Thurlow, his authority cannot be relied on.

Colman at Westminster, p. 46.—An epistle of his to Lord Viscount Pulteney, written from school in 1747, is printed in the St. James's Magazine, vol. ii. p. 240. In this poor Coley,

> Who still is drudging in the college
> In slow pursuit of further knowledge,

complains, in untranscribable rhyme, that many a cruel lash was laid on him,

> To make him sometime hence a parson;
> A judge, perhaps, or a physician,
> Strolling on Ratcliff's exhibition.

After describing the manner in which he supposes his friend to pass his time on the continent, visiting the camp there, and the foreign courts, he concludes thus:

> Though I have long with study mental
> Laboured at language oriental,
> Yet in my soil the Hebrew root
> Has scarcely made one single shoot.
>
> I've now broke up, but have a task though,
> Harder than yours with Mr. Mascow;

For mine's as knotty as the Devil.
Your law and master both are civil,
With milder means to learning lead,
By different roads with different speed;
Douglas and you keep gently jogging,
But I must run the race with flogging.

Cowper's papers in the Connoisseur, p. 49.—Five papers are certainly his, Nos. 111. 115. 119. 134. and 138. Whether the letters by Mr. Town's cousin Village, in other numbers, (13. 23. 41. 76. 81. 105. and 139,) are also his, is uncertain,—most probably not, for they are not assigned to the same author as the five former, in the concluding paper.

Gray's Bard, p. 50.—This ode was first published in 1757, with that on the Progress of Poetry. The Monthly Review treated the author respectfully, but informed him that he was not taking the way to be popular. "As this publication," says the critic, "seems designed for those who have formed their taste by the models of antiquity, the generality of readers cannot be supposed adequate judges of its merit; nor will the poet, it is presumed, be greatly disappointed if he finds them backward in commending a performance not entirely suited to their apprehensions. We cannot, however, without some regret, behold those talents so capable of giving pleasure to all, exerted on efforts that, at best, can amuse only the few; we cannot behold this rising poet seeking fame among the learned, without hinting to him the same advice that Isocrates used to give his scholars, *study the people*." Vol. xvii. p. 239.

The two burlesque odes were reviewed in the same journal at great length, and with due praise, for they are excellent of their kind,—but on the kind itself, there are these just remarks:—"This way of reciting and wresting the verses of truly respectable writers, is at best but a kind of literary mimickry; the success of which considerably depends on the copy's being exaggerated beyond the original, by an injurious resemblance, sometimes termed *outré* by the French; while it attempts to interest us also, from that excess of self-love, which too generally disposes a man to depreciate the excellence of another in any art or faculty, to which he forms pretensions himself. Nevertheless not to urge these suggestions beyond what the

present occasion will strictly bear, we do not suppose our ingenious bard was actuated by sheer acrimony, or an *ærugo mera*, as Horace strongly expresses it, against his eminent poetical brethren here; but we rather conjecture, that an ardent sprightly imagination, joined to some consciousness of his own faculties and attainments, has excited him to the present *lusus ingenii, cum tantillo invidiæ*. In this view it will appear tolerably venial, if we consider how far juvenile emulation may operate, and recollect, as some writer pleasantly expresses it, that 'wits are game cocks to one another.'

"We are conscious of having allowed more room to this article, than we generally do to those on such short performances; and chiefly, because the contention of rival wits and poets has often something so entertaining, as to engage the attention of the literary, the poetical, and elegant, who, we suppose, constitute a great proportion of our readers. But we shall conclude with hinting to our mettlesome ode-writer, upon the whole, that the most pardonable, the most creditable way of lowering his over-towering brethren, is to excel them. And whenever he has attained this glorious, because difficult, supereminence, let him watch his own demeanour so assiduously, as to give no occasion to the *genus irritabile*, the poetical hornets, to object that very pride and superciliousness to him, which he has ridiculed, and, we hope, intended to reform, in others."—Vol. xxiii. pp. 57—63. July, 1760.

Foote's personalities, p. 68.—The last editor of Churchill's poems (in 1804) has offered a most insufficient apology for this part of Foote's conduct. "His exposing living characters on the stage," says this gentleman, "has been much censured: but we cannot help thinking, that authors of this kind are in some respects more useful to the age in which they live, than those who only range abroad into the various scenes of life for general character." As if this were any excuse for holding up the harmless weaknesses or peculiarities of a private individual to public ridicule!

Excesses which Churchill braved in the strength of a robust frame, p. 90.

"For me let Galen moulder on the shelf;
I'll live, and be physician to myself.

Whilst soul is join'd to body, whether fate
Allot a longer or a shorter date,
I'll make them live as brother should with brother,
And keep them in good humour with each other.

"The surest road to health, say what they will,
Is—never to suppose we shall be ill.
Most of those evils we poor mortals know,
From doctors and imagination flow.
Hence to old women with your boasted rules,
Stale traps, and only sacred now to fools!
As well may sons of physic hope to find
One medicine, as one hour for all mankind.

"If Rupert after ten is out of bed,
The fool, next morning, can't hold up his head.
What reason this which me to bed must call,
Whose head, thank Heaven! never aches at all?
In different courses different tempers run;
He hates the moon; I sicken at the sun.
Wound up at twelve at noon, his clock goes right;
Mine better goes wound up at twelve at night."

Night, v. 69—84.

Lloyd alludes to this passage in some lines which seem to imply that he could not follow his friend's course with impunity.

"Wits ——
—— live a life of imitation,
Are slovens, revellers, and brutes,
Laborious, absent, prattlers, mutes,
From some example handed down
Of some great genius of renown.

"If Addison, from habit's trick,
Could bite his fingers to the quick,
Shall not I nibble from design,
And be an Addison to mine?
If Pope most feelingly complains
Of aching head, and throbbing pains,
My head and arm his posture hit,
And I already *ache* for wit.

If Churchill, following Nature's call,
Has 'head that never aches at all;'
With burning brow and heavy eye,
I'll give my looks and pain the lie."

Epistle to a Friend who sent the Author a Hamper of Wine. St. James's Mag. Oct. 1763.

Poor Lloyd, by his own confession, played the rake with a heavy heart.

No man knew better than Churchill that the art of poetry requires no ordinary pains, p. 92.

How much mistaken are the men who think
That all who will without restraint may drink;
May largely drink, ev'n till their bowels burst,
Pleading no right but merely that of thirst,
At the pure waters of the living well,
Beside whose streams the Muses love to dwell!
Verse is with them a knack, an idle toy,
A rattle gilded o'er, on which a boy
May play untaught, whilst, without art or force,
Make it but jingle, music comes of course.
Little do such men know the toil, the pains,
The daily, nightly, racking of the brains,
To range the thoughts, the matter to digest,
To cull fit phrases, and reject the rest;
To know the times when humour on the cheek
Of mirth may hold her sports; when wit should speak,
And when be silent; when to use the powers
Of ornament, and how to place the flowers,
So that they neither give a tawdry glare,
"Nor waste their sweetness in the desert air;"
To form, (which few can do,—and scarcely one,
One critic in an age, can find when done,)
To form a plan, to strike a grand outline,
To fill it up, and make the picture shine
A full and perfect piece; to make coy rhyme
Renounce her follies, and with sense keep time;
To make proud sense against her nature bend,
And wear the chains of rhyme, yet call her friend.

Gotham, b. ii. v. 1—22.

The St. James's Magazine, p. 94.—Lloyd's declaration of what his Magazine was not to contain, shows what were the usual attractions of such publications at that time.

No pictures taken from the life,
Where all proportions are at strife;
No humming-bird, no painted flower,
No beast just landed at the Tower;
No wooden notes, no coloured map,
No country-dance shall stop a gap.
O, Philomath, be not severe
If not one problem meets you here,
Where gossip A and neighbour B
Pair, like good friends, with C and D,
And E F G, H I J join,
And curve and incidental line
Fall out, fall in, and cross each other,
Just like a sister and a brother.
Ye tiny poets, tiny wits,
Who frisk about on tiny tits,
Who words disjoin, and sweetly sing,
Take one third part, and take the thing,
Then close the joints again to frame
Some lady's or some city's name;
Enjoy your own, your proper Phœbus;
We neither make nor print a rebus.
No crambo, no acrostic fine,
Great letters lacing down each line;
No strange conundrum, no invention
Beyond the reach of comprehension;
No riddle, which whoe'er unties,
Claims twelve MUSEUMS for the PRIZE,
Shall strive to please you at the expense
Of simple taste and common sense.

Charles Denis, p. 95.—The Monthly Review (April, 1754), noticing Denis's Select Fables in Verse, says, "In regard to his versification, it is not unaptly characterized by what Mr. Congreve observed of the Pindariques of his time; as being 'a bundle of rambling incoherent thoughts, expressed in a like parcel of irregular stanzas, which also consist of such another

complication of disproportioned, uncertain, and perplexed verses and rhymes.' "

Congreve's just description could not have been more unaptly applied. The reviewers have entirely overlooked the subject-matter of the poems, and the key in which the metre was pitched.

Lloyd thus characterizes Denis more fairly, though too favourably.

> Originals will always please;
> And copies too, if done with ease.
> Would not old Plautus wish to bear,
> Turn'd English host, an English air,
> If Thornton, rich in native wit,
> Would make the modes and diction fit?
> Or,—as I know you hate to roam,—
> To fetch an instance nearer home;
> Though in an idiom most unlike,
> A similarity must strike,
> Where both, of simple nature fond,
> In art and genius correspond;
> And *naïve* both (allow the phrase,
> Which no one English word conveys)
> Wrap up their stories neat and clean;
> Easy as—
>
> FRIEND.
>
> Denis's you mean.
> The very man,—not mere translation,
> But La Fontaine by transmigration.
>
> AUTHOR.
>
> Authors, as Dryden's maxim runs,
> Have what he calls poetic sons.
> Thus Milton, more correctly wild,
> Was richer Spenser's lawful child;
> And Churchill, got on all the Nine,
> Is Dryden's heir in every line.
> Thus Denis proves his parents plain,
> The child of Ease and La Fontaine.
>
> *St. James's Mag.* vol. i. p. 380.

A Poem in the St. James's Magazine, probably by Cowper, p. 95.—

AN ODE.

SECUNDUM ARTEM.

1.

Shall I begin with *Ah*, or *Oh?*
Be sad? *Oh!* yes. Be glad? *Ah!* no.
Light subjects suit not grave Pindaric ode,
Which walks in metre down the Strophic road.
But let the sober matron wear
Her own mechanic sober air:
Ah me! ill suits, *alas!* the sprightly jig,
Long robes of ermine, or Sir Cloudsley's wig.
Come, placid Dulness, gently come,
And all my faculties benumb;
Let thought turn exile, while the vacant mind
To trickie words and pretty phrase confin'd,
Pumping for trim description's art,
To win the ear, neglects the heart.
So shall thy sister Taste's peculiar sons,
Lineal descendants from the Goths and Huns,
Struck with the true and grand sublime
Of *rythm* converted into *rime*,
Court the quaint muse, and con her lessons o'er,
Where sleep the sluggish waves by Granta's shore:
There shall each poet pare and trim,
Stretch, cramp, or lop the verse's limb,
While rebel Wit beholds them with disdain,
And Fancy flies aloft, nor heeds their servile chain.

2.

Oh, Fancy, bright aërial maid!
Where have thy vagrant footsteps stray'd?
For, *Ah!* I miss thee 'midst thy wonted haunt,
Since silent now th' enthusiastic chaunt,
Which erst like frenzy roll'd along,
Driv'n by th' impetuous tide of song;
Rushing secure where native genius bore,
Not cautious coasting by the shelving shore.
Hail to the sons of modern Rime,
Mechanic dealers in sublime,

Whose lady Muse full wantonly is dress'd
In light expressions quaint, and tinsel vest,
Where swelling epithets are laid
(Art's ineffectual parade)
As varnish on the cheek of harlot light;
The rest thin sown with profit or delight,
But ill compares with ancient song,
Where Genius pour'd its flood along:
Yet such is Art's presumptuous idle claim,
She marshals out the way to modern fame;
From Grecian fables' pompous lore
Description's studied, glittering store,
Smooth, soothing sounds, and sweet alternate rime,
Clinking, like change of bells, in tingle tangle chime.

3.

The lark shall soar in every Ode,
With flow'rs of light description strew'd;
And sweetly, warbling Philomel, shall flow
Thy soothing sadness in mechanic woe.
Trim epithets shall spread their gloss,
While ev'ry cell's o'ergrown with moss:
Here oaks shall rise in chains of ivy bound,
There smouldering stones o'erspread the rugged ground.
Here forests brown, and azure hills,
There babbling fonts, and prattling rills;
Here some gay river floats in crisped streams,
While the bright sun now gilds his morning beams,
Or sinking to his Thetis' breast,
Drives in description down the west.
Oh let me boast, with pride becoming skill,
I crown the summit of Parnassus' hill:
While Taste with Genius shall dispense,
And sound shall triumph over sense;
O'er the gay mead with curious steps I'll stray,
And, like the bee, steal all its sweets away;
Extract its beauty, and its power,
From every new poetic flower,
Whose sweets collected may a wreath compose,
To bind the poet's brow, or please the critic's nose.

Lines to Lloyd, p. 99, n. 28.—The epistle from which these lines are extracted is signed R. Shepherd,—a learned, pious, and exemplary man, afterwards archdeacon of Bedford. Happy had it been for Lloyd if his most intimate associates had held the same sane and salutary opinions. A list of his works may be found in Nichols's Literary Anecdotes, vol. ii. 328. Among those works is "The Nuptials, a didactic poem, in three books," 1762, 4to.; and the following passage, remarkable enough in itself, in one of Lloyd's Dialogues, identifies the author of that poem with his correspondent. The Poet is replying to a Friend who advises him to produce

——— a work of length,
Something which speaks poetic strength.—

AUTHOR.

The current studies of the day
Can rarely reach beyond a Play:
A Pamphlet may deserve a look,
But heaven defend us from a BOOK!
A libel flies on scandal's wings,
But works of length are heavy things;
Not one in twenty will succeed:
Consider, sir, how few can read.

FRIEND.

I mean a work of *merit*.

AUTHOR.

True.

FRIEND.

A man of *taste* MUST buy.

AUTHOR.

Yes; you
And half a dozen more, my friend,
Whom your good taste shall recommend.
Experience will by facts prevail,
When argument and reason fail;
The NUPTIALS now—

FRIEND.

Whose Nuptials, sir?

AUTHOR.

A Poet's. Did that poem *stir*?
No,—fixt, though thousand readers pass,
It still looks through its pane of glass,
And seems indignant to exclaim,
Pass on, ye SONS of TASTE, for shame!
Vol. i. p. 374.

Lloyd in the Fleet, p. 102.—When Lloyd's fable of the Hare and Tortoise was originally published in the Connoisseur, (No. 90, Oct. 15, 1755,) one of the editors prefaced it with an introductory paper, part of which Thornton, Colman, and Lloyd himself, must at this time have looked back upon as prophetic.

"If we consider that part of our acquaintances whom we remember from their infancy, we shall find that the expectations we once entertained of their future abilities are in many instances disappointed. Those who were accounted heavy dull boys, have by diligence and application made their way to the first honours, and become eminent for their learning and knowledge of the world; while others who were regarded as bright lads, and imagined to possess parts equal to any scheme of life, have turned out dissolute and ignorant; and quite unworthy the title of a genius, except in the modern acceptation of the word, by which it signifies a very silly young fellow, who, from his extravagance and debauchery, has obtained the name of a genius, like *lucus a non lucendo*, because he has no genius at all.

"It is a shocking drawback from a father's happiness, when he sees his son blessed with strong natural parts and quick conception, to reflect that these very talents may be his ruin. If vanity once gets into his head and gives it a wrong turn, the young coxcomb will neglect the means of improvement, trust entirely to his native abilities, and be as ridiculously proud of his parts, as the brats of quality are taught to be of their family. In the meantime, those whom nature threw far behind him, are by application enabled to leave him at a distance in their turn; and he continues boasting of his genius, till it subsists no longer, but dies for want of cultivation. Thus vanity and indolence prevent his improvement; and if he is to rise in the world by his merit, take away the means of success, and perhaps reduce him to very miserable distresses. I know one of these early geniuses who scarce supports himself by writing for a bookseller;

and another who is at leisure to contemplate his extraordinary parts in the Fleet prison."

Sir Richard Sutton, p. 106.—He was a younger son of Sir Robert Sutton and Lady Sunderland. When he went to Cambridge, in 1750, after having been long at the head of the school, Warburton introduced him by letter to Hurd, as the most extraordinary boy he had ever known. "If you won't take my word," he adds, "I will give you Dr. Nicoll's, who tells me he never met with his fellow?—a perfect boy in the simplicity of his manners, but of surprising acquirements. Besides his knowledge of the antient languages, he speaks and writes Spanish and French with great exactness, understands Italian, and is now learning High Dutch."

Eleven years afterwards Hurd writes to Warburton, "Mr. Sutton did me the favour to steal away from his companions on the circuit last week, and to spend a day with me at Thurcaston. He seems intent upon his profession. But what pleased me most was to find the same sweetness of temper and simplicity of manners which he carried out with him when he made the grand tour. I took that short visit very kindly, and the more so, as he promises to repeat it as oft as he comes to Leicester." —*Nichols's Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. v. 541—2.

Mr. Sutton succeeded to his father's baronetcy, and I know not that he was heard of either in literature, or in public life, for both which he seems to have been so richly endowed by nature, and so carefully to have qualified himself. Indolence cannot have been the cause of this: probably he was wise enough to enjoy the blessings which fortune offered him, and which he could not have enjoyed unless he had been too wise to be ambitious of notoriety or power.

Whole Duty of Man, p. 116.—"Very strange," says the Monthly Review (April, 1764), "that several of our established clergy, who have had a liberal education, should seem ambitious, at this day, of rivalling the old Puritans in absurdity and fanaticism; and under a pretence of supplying the *defects*, truly, of that excellent and useful tract called the Whole Duty of Man, they are presenting us with a *Wholer* Duty of Man, by introducing a system, or rather a farrago, of such doubtful, dark,

and abstruse notions, as the author of the aforesaid tract had very prudently and piously omitted.

The Olney Hymns met with some opposition in a quarter where it was little expected, p. 269.—I have received, says Mr. Newton, (I suppose from the author) a book Mr. Romaine has lately published on the subject of Psalmody. I wish he had treated it in a different manner. I do not feel myself hurt by his censure of modern hymn makers, but I am afraid it will hurt some weak, well meaning people, who consider him as little less than infallible, to be told, that whatever comfort they may think they have received from singing hymns in public worship was only imaginary. And he has laid himself very open to those who do not love him. He seems to ascribe all the deadness that is complained of in many places where the gospel is preached (I suppose he chiefly means the London dissenters,) to their not singing Sternhold and Hopkins. Strange that a wise man can advance such paradoxes. This judgement involves not only the Dissenters, and the Locke, but the Tabernacle, Tottenham Court, Everton, Helmsley, and many other places where, I should think, we must allow the Lord has afforded his blessing. The curate of Olney, and his poor people, may be content to be reviled amongst so much good company. I think many of his best friends must wish this book had not appeared. What a mercy is it, that we are not to stand or fall by man's judgement! Some of us here know that the Lord has comforted us by hymns, which express scriptural truths, though not confined to the words of David's Psalms; and we know, by the effects, we are not mistaken. I believe Dr. Watts's hymns have been a singular blessing to the churches, notwithstanding Mr. Romaine does not like them.—*Letter to Mr. Thornton, Aug.* 3, 1775.

END OF VOL. I.

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